

Interpreting the Future



A New Beginning: A Vision of the Future

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Years ago someone said that the National Parks are the best idea this country ever had. **Idea** is the key word in this essay.

An idea is something intangible and aspiring. It bids us to shift from the shambling gait of just getting by.

An idea needs good soil to flourish. Yet both within the National Parks and beyond—in the socio-economic and environmental context that nourishes or stunts—that “best idea,” faces malnourishment. Society fragments and wars upon itself—nationally and internationally—over diminishing resources. Politics degenerates in a theater of the absurd that mocks values and ideals. Local and world environments strike back after centuries of pillage and rapine.

Small wonder, in such debilitating context, that Service and System suffer deficits, deficits spiritual and material. Glitter gets the gold. Things of substance waste away.

How do we illustrate "Interpreting the Future"? The photograph we have chosen of the Earth rising from behind the Moon is symbolic of the subject of this issue and of our future as a Nation. The photo was taken by the Apollo 8 astronauts in December 1968. And who knows, someday there may indeed be a National Historic Site at Tranquility Base.

The National Park System must be viewed as a cultural achievement unparalleled in world history. It must continue to be seen as a standard of excellence in a world bent on degrading excellence—excellence of spirit, mind, and body; excellence of both built and natural environments.

Deep attrition at all of these levels has already occurred. The *elan vital* of the Service, the physical patrimony of the System have suffered, but they are not yet dead.

We know that the foreseeable future will be hard, for it is mortgaged and our children and their children will still be paying the bills incurred in our times. We know that centuries from now humankind will still be trying to reestablish the balance with Nature so prodigally upset by the excesses of recent history. We can hope that this imperative, peace with Nature, will act as solvent in human affairs as well. The alternative is too bleak to discuss. So, in summary, our job will not be easy.

Initially, the national parks represented a social investment for the inspiration, edification, and enjoyment of the people. They still do, of course. But now we are beyond that simple innocence of purpose, which was aesthetic at its root.

In the world just described we have opportunity to repay society with a coin of different sort, not more valuable but more utilitarian. In the process we can find ourselves again. We can shake lethargy and apathy. We can resurrect our *elan vital*. And we can save the parks, our first obligation as trustees.

There have always been those who viewed the parks as mere amenities of an enlightened and affluent society. An amenity is nice but not necessary. We members of the choir have always viewed the parks as necessities, as foundation blocks in a civil, caring society. But, to be specific, we seldom hear reciprocal harmonies from those who control the money. Gimlet-eyed budgeteers deal in measurable quantities, including votes for the party in power. In the lean years ahead, sharp-pencilled Philistines will wield evermore power and will support only the starkly necessary. Nice won't count.

You may have guessed the direction of this argument. We—meaning preeminently the parks, but also their committed guardians and trustees—must be **necessary** elements of this society: not only to those who have consistently shared our values and helped us stick to them, but also to those whose values have heretofore questioned the value of the parks.

Now, there are many levels of necessity. The National Park Service from the beginning has (if not shamelessly at least enthusiastically) consorted with railroads, tourism boomers, and the economic interests of neighboring communities to promote the System. Even—in fact especially—the great founders Mather and Albright knew that the higher appeal of the parks could not alone suffice in a society whose main motivations tended to focus on the Almighty Dollar. Nor has the Service been altogether loath to further the cause of parklands by playing the quid-pro-quo game of politics.

These forays into the real world continue and will always be with us. They are not evil. Within reason they are the price of accep-

tance for high-order values in a society only partly composed of Thoreaus and Muirs.

But what if we could find a role for parklands central to the necessities of this stressed society (and species), a role untarnished by lower-order economics and politics?

We have that opportunity—in a dual, entirely complementary thematic nexus that is also central to the original and evolved mission of the Service.

Most readers of this essay and increasing numbers of the lay public know that the states of health of society and the environment are reciprocal. An unhealthy, unstable, and warring society (or species) wastes the environment. A wasted environment both produces social chaos and lacks the buffering sustenance to calm such chaos. In these circumstances, the haves fight to keep, the have-nots fight to get. Thus the wars—economic and military—go on, further wasting the environment. Add to these daily headlines the ominous global trends of climate change and the like: the products of two centuries of techno-fantasy that imagines still that a finite world is infinite in resources and capacity for absorption of waste, all compounded by the astronomical increases of population in modern times.

This is not a pretty picture. Unchecked, this progression promises to invade and consume every last combustible, mineral, rock, body of water, and gasp of air. National parks, as already in less fortunate lands, would cease to exist—whether consumed, flooded, or desertified by the combination of desperate humans and berserk natural forces.

In this context let us revisit the Organic Act: To preserve and protect the National Parks is the first and constant prerequisite to the end that they remain “unimpaired for future generations.” Only an idiot could fail to see the connection between what has been written above and the central mission of this Service. If one accepts the premises of this argument, then the current interpretation of that central mission registers like a two-by-four to the temple: The Service must dramatically expand its functions as social and biological solvent and healer in a world desperately needing succor.

On the **social front** the parks provide one of the few truly democratic facilities for enjoyment and inspiration of **all** of the people. To the extent that we become inclusive in our welcome, understanding, accommodation, and interpretation of all the constituent populations of this nation (and beyond) we help reduce fragmentation and strife. Use of the Columbus Quincentennial opportunity to redefine our national history by fully and fairly interpreting the contributions of the diverse cultural elements of our society provides an example of this social function. It aims to make the parks the cultural property of all culture groups in this country, not the exclusive resort of the dominant group that until recently monopolized our historiography.

Remember, only a unified society can move with vigor in the cause of environmental reform.

On the **biological front** our already established programs and

local planning involvements to convey the environmental ethic must be geometrically enhanced by a two-part (science and interpretation) leadership role in the biospheric science network now abuilding. The national parks of the United States provide a large number of the best baseline geographies left in this world. As research and monitoring stations in the worldwide network that checks and forecasts global change, they are, in aggregate, unparalleled. But only through the most skillful interpretation can the messages of science be delivered to help humankind avert the worst consequences and adapt to those that can't be avoided.

Remember, only a sustaining environment can save our society and species, and the national parks.

Note that sociology and biology are one.

The Future of Interpretation: New Twists on a Familiar Tune

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Without the benefit of a crystal ball it is difficult to predict the future with any degree of accuracy. Nonetheless, it's safe to say that some issues are so ingrained in our Agency's mission and the profession of interpretation that they are too pervasive to simply fade away. This article focuses on four areas that form the nucleus of interpretation, the people (that is interpreters), the audience, the message, and the medium; and attempts to place them in historical and futuristic context.

While we live in a dynamic world, the fundamental mission of the National Park Service remains essentially unchanged, although the 21st Century Task Force has recently added some new dimensions and proposed a new mission statement:

The National Park Service is dedicated to preserving the natural, cultural, recreational, scenic, and scientific resources and values of the national park system for the use, enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations: to identifying and advocating protection of other nationally significant resources and values: and to leading and assisting others in providing recreational opportunities and identifying and protecting the natural and cultural heritage of the nation and the world.

This mandate—the double edged sword of **preservation and use**, which dates to the 1916 legislation that created the agency, continues to challenge park managers to this day. The attempt to strike an appropriate balance between the two will continue to vex administrators for generations to come. It is in this milieu that interpretation must operate as an integral part of the Agency's mission.

The Social and Political Milieu of National Parks

How we view National Parks and subsequently what we attempt to communicate to visitors has evolved over time. The Washburn sur-

* Michael Paskowsky wishes to acknowledge the incorporation of ideas from John Byrne, Project Manager, Appalachian National Scenic Trail Project Office.

vey that first mapped Yellowstone in 1870, suggested that the spectacular wilderness be set aside for public enjoyment. Implicit in their thinking was that a landscape dotted with bubbling geysers had little economic value anyway.

Today we are beginning to view parks ecosystemically. They are not insular islands of hope but are integral parts of the natural, social, and political worlds which surround them.

They can be used as models against which we can measure and compare changes that happen both within and outside park boundaries. They are biological reserves but also places where people can enjoy and learn from their natural and cultural heritage.

It has been a long circuitous route that brought us to this way of thinking. Once set aside as a public reserve, the earliest efforts at Yellowstone and other parks was to provide public access and accommodations. Rail connections were made, roads were built, and rustic lodges were constructed. Concessionaires were enlisted to pamper the well-heeled vacationers. Parks were called “pleasuring grounds.” It is interesting to note that these fledgling efforts at tourism have since gone big time. A Japanese conglomerate has acquired the system’s largest concession (Yosemite’s Curry Company)* and it is projected that tourism will be the nation’s leading industry at the turn of the century.

To a certain extent, the “well-to-do” air of national parks, owing to their appeal to a wealthier, better educated segment of our society, has never worn off. What is hailed as America’s gift to the world in some circles, is a stigma in others. Critics chide park appropriations as “welfare for the rich,” arguing that a family vacation to the “crown jewels” is beyond the reach of many minority families and inner-city dwellers. To a large extent expansion of the system into urban recreation areas is an attempt to mollify this criticism.

Just as the idea of national parks has evolved over time, the public’s perception of what is and what should be a national park has also matured. Originally parks were carved out of public land. That constraint no longer limits expansion of the system.

Today we look to the abandoned mills and factories, the decrepit immigration stations and prisons, even deserted railroad rights-of-way for park lands. This expansion is driven by a need to rediscover our natural and cultural heritage, to provide much needed recreational opportunities, as well as a compelling desire to revitalize decaying post-industrial communities. Ellis Island might be considered the twentieth century equivalent of Yellowstone.

Growth of national parks to a certain degree is self-limiting—there are only so many places of national significance. Growth of the system will probably be greatest in the non-park recreation areas such as the river and trails programs, which have potential of serving greater audiences by virtue of their proximity to metropolitan areas. They will also rely on innovative partnerships consisting of consortia of groups, individuals, and governments to protect and operate them.

* Editor’s Note: Since this article was prepared, the Yosemite Park and Curry company was sold to the National Park Foundation.

The Audience

It is estimated that park visitation will double by the time the National Park Service celebrates its centennial in 2016. Because of the potential adverse impact of this growth, interpretation will be called upon to both serve the needs of this expanded audience and to channel their energy into non-destructive uses. Because park visitors will reflect a greater ethnic and cultural diversity, including groups who have not been traditional park users in the past, the potential for misunderstanding and conflicting values will be increased. This will challenge interpreters to present the significance of sites to groups that may not share the same attitudes.

In reaching out to a broader constituency, interpretive activities will increasingly take place in non-traditional settings. Look for more off-site interaction with groups at schools, civic organizations, senior centers and conservation groups. Look for more coordination and interaction with tour operators and Chambers of Commerce in promoting area attractions and encouraging **appropriate** tourism development. With increasing demand for limited recreational resources, interpreters and park managers will be spending more time juggling the needs of competing interest groups.

The Messages

The unmistakable message from scientists is that there is trouble in paradise. Behind the pretty scenery and the carefully pruned facade, internal and external threats may undermine what has been called America's greatest gift to the world. Like the canary in the mineshaft, the song of national parks is fading; perhaps the warning sound of looming global catastrophe. As the nation's principal conservation agency, what are our responsibilities to the future?

Some of the things interpreters can do is deliver more globally focused interpretation to empower citizens to understand the natural and cultural world and their place in it. It needn't be a doom and gloom story, but one that promotes the notion that the actions of individuals can make a difference. Indeed many park areas can trace their origins to the action and conviction of a group or an individual.

The People (Interpreters)

The people who deliver the messages to the public are changing too. Due in some part to the low starting salaries and limited career ladders, there is a smaller pool of applicants for jobs than at any previous period. As a result, front line interpreters are less likely to be the college graduate who dreamed of becoming a ranger since childhood. Today and tomorrow's interpreter will likely be quite different.

They will be older, more culturally diverse, and possibly less mobile because of the demands of dual careers and child rearing. Because of the shrinking pool of job applicants, recruitment will include more non-traditional sources such as retired persons, part-time employees, and dual career couples. As our population matures and leisure time increases, it is reasonable to expect volunteers to become an important source as well.

The Medium

How we interact with visitors is as likely to change as what it is we are telling them. Face to face interaction, real people talking with other folks, will play a strong role in the future. But other non-personal contacts will continue to play a prominent supporting function. Some of the ways technology can assist visitors and interpreters are discussed below.

Information Systems

Clearly the computer is here to stay. Word processors are a way of life and computer aided design programs are becoming more commonplace. Computer applications are evolving into multi-media systems that harness the power of audio and video components and storage devices such as videodiscs. These applications have great potential to serve visitors.

Interactive information systems are appearing more frequently in park and museum settings. They have the advantage of being able to provide limitless amounts of data that can be customized for the specific needs of individuals. For example they can be used to plan an itinerary for a visit at a park, museum, or community; based on the users' interest, budget, and time. The system can contain up-to-the-minute schedules of programs and events, as well as important variable information such as weather conditions or safety messages. In short, they can provide the exact information visitors are seeking exactly when they are seeking it.

The downside is that they require a financial and staffing commitment to update the accuracy of the information. The more detail and the greater degree of "currentness," the more expensive the system. Hence sophisticated systems are more likely to be initiated as collaborative projects by Chambers of Commerce or Tourism Councils in concert with parks and museums.

Besides serving visitors, these systems also have the benefit of transforming even the newest employees into an instant expert, enabling them to answer detailed questions posed by visitors. Even the simplest system has the prospect of reducing the number of repetitive questions asked at information desks.

In addition, there is growing demand for educational products, and the market for interactive video programs is expected to experience considerable growth. The scientific and historical subjects we deal with in National Parks are prime materials for school, library, and eventually home markets. If developed and marketed by cooperating associations, these programs could help provide needed revenue to support interpretive activities.

Simulations

Computer simulation is another growth area. This medium allows visitors to experience an event or issue in a non-threatening or non-destructive manner. Complex subjects like the U.S. Constitution or environmental issues can be presented in easy to use segments. Dangerous situations like bear encounters can be simulated to educate visitors regarding appropriate behavior. Subjects like the effects of acid rain, the relationship between predators and animal populations, or the impact of global warming could be presented as entertaining, participatory programs.

Surrogate travel, possibly utilizing computer generated images or satellite photos can enable armchair travelers to visit parks in the comfort of their home. This technology makes remote or inaccessible areas suddenly available. This could reduce impact on fragile or unsafe areas, as well as opening a whole new world for those with physical or mental impairments.

The value and marketing potential of educational software is just beginning to be explored. By enabling the creation of menu-driven paths of inquiry, the public would have access to information gathered at great expense, but which is often unavailable. The knowledge squirreled away in park reports, the treasures of park museum collections, the miles of film and video footage can be liberated from the dusty shelves and back rooms and made available to those footing the bill—the public.

Special Populations

Technology also brings the prospect of increased service for visitors. Captions can be easily added to audiovisual programs to aid the hearing impaired. The availability of separate sound tracks on video discs or the use of listening systems enable the delivery of multilingual sound tracks to serve a diverse audience. Visually impaired visitors can benefit from “audio description” which provides a richly narrated track to enable them to form mental images of what they cannot see. This can be presented via infrared transmission synchronized with films, as a separate sound track to accompany video programs, or by cassette or portable cd players.

Interpreters In The 21st Century

I don't think interpreters need worry of extinction anytime soon. Their subject matter specialty and communication skills will be in great demand. To serve our changing population, interpreters will be recruited to better reflect the ethnic and cultural pluralism of the nation and focus on the innate abilities of people. New skills such as more emphasis on sciences and mediation skills might become increasingly important.

Coping With the Future

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“It's all in your head.” How rarely the full implication of that declaration strikes home. Yet as John W Gardner, the former Secretary of the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare observes, “Fatalists do not have much impact on events. The future is shaped by people who believe in the future.” From his experiences Gardner came to recognize the power of morale and motivation—both of which are controlled by perceptions of self worth.

“Those who have worked with populations living in deep poverty in the less-developed nations of the world,” Gardner writes, “know the fatalism and passivity that exist when people do not believe they can affect their future in any significant way.” And so it is for everyone.

Gardner recounts a story from closer to home, when he attended a seminar on education with Martin Luther King. The woman lead-

ing the seminar had entitled her talk, “First, Teach Them to Read.” King leaned over to Gardner and said, “First, teach them to believe in themselves.” Only if there is a feeling of self worth can anyone learn or be positive about the future.

Coping with the future also requires an ability to recognize patterns of change. Ralph Bledsoe of the President’s Domestic Policy Council speaks of “looking for the waves that are cresting.” Management consultant William Ashley describes how people and institutions can move from paradigm paralysis (resistance to change) to paradigm pliancy (adaptiveness). “Getting there from here,” is the way Ashley puts it, beginning first with fresh thinking, developing a realization the paradigm (values, conditions) has shifted, anticipating and preparing for change, and then educating for change.

As voracious readers and gatherers of information, interpreters are at their best at recognizing trends and educating for change. Many trends are negative and cause for despair: A woman in Kenya needed only three and a half minutes in 1947 to collect wood for her family’s cooking, but needed three to four hours in 1989. Carbon dioxide levels rose from 278 parts per million in 1970 to almost 350 parts per million in 1990. The rise in ocean levels is accelerating, from five inches in the past century to perhaps three feet by the end of the next century. More than three-quarters of the oil within the United States has been burned.

Contrariwise, other trends do offer promise. A shift to high hydrogen fuels could result in a twenty percent reduction in CO₂ emissions. Producing energy with a carboline process could leave carbon as carbon black (pure carbon) instead of as CO₂. Coal would become a hydrogen source instead of a carbon source. Electronics communications is promoting a global consciousness. Tourism is now the world’s largest industry, making up 25 percent of the world’s economy. With a total value in the trillions, and growing by five to seven percent each year, it is a vital force for peace. Exposure to other cultures promotes flexibility of thinking and acceptance of other ways of living.

Effective interpreters internalize a mix of these positive and negative implications but they don’t espouse doom and gloom. They articulate promising alternatives for living. And the alternatives are as limitless as our imagination.

“Life requires unrelenting effort, a willingness to try,” penned Gardner. “In humans, the long process of evolution has produced a species of problem solvers, happiest when engaged in tasks that require not only physical effort but also the engagement of the mind and heart. We are not only problem solvers but problem seekers.”

How sublime then the flexibility designed into our laws. “The Framers [of the Constitution] had a genius for studied imprecision,” declares Leonard W Levy of the Claremont Graduate School. “They were conscious of the need to phrase the Constitution in generalized terms and without a lexicographical guide, for they meant to outline an instrument that would serve future generations.”

Let us look closer at some flexible language in the Constitution.

“The Congress,” states Article IV in part, “shall have Power to ... make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or

other Property belonging to the United States.” Needful to whom? Needful to Congress. How does Congress determine what is needful? It does so through its collective comprehension of the world. By the information provided to it by the Executive Branch, by lobbyists, by family and friends, by information (or opinion) that washes over it from all sources.

Suddenly we see that policies and laws regarding the Earth are not forever frozen in place. They **can** change. New laws can appear in a thousand dimensions as knowledge redefines “needful.” Cave wilderness. Repatriation of human remains. Toxic waste disposal. Air quality. Land zoning. Animal rights. Revitalization of American Indian cultures. What extraordinary opportunities are then before us to sublimate the meaning of “needful”.

“The real explorer is not the man who is following a map, but the man who is making one,” writes Paul Theroux. For all the collective wisdom of humankind, there is still wisdom to construct. The world is desperately in need of men and women with original vision—call them philosophers, call them interpreters—who can reveal richer, healthier, more satisfying, and more harmonious ways of living.

Farewell to 025: Empowering Interpreters to Meet Today’s Global Environmental Change

John Byrne*
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What will the future be? For us?
As a world population? As a species?
As employees of the National Park Service?
What is the role of the Interpreter?

The world will be different in the near-term future. Disastrously different for the species “homo sapiens” unless we **realize** as a society, as a race, what our consumptive life style—our profligate way of living—is doing to the planet, and then **act** as a society to change our way of living and enable the earth’s environment to heal itself.

Is man too greedy, too complacent, or too lazy to make these changes? If informed of the consequences of carrying on life as usual will man make the changes necessary to save the earth?

From the following three trends we can start to gain insight of what could happen:

1. **Global warming** Recent estimates of global warming predict that, if we continue to burn fossil fuels at current pace, average global temperatures will rise 5.4 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of

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the 21st Century, a rate of temperature rise not experienced for tens of thousands of years. There is a remarkable degree of consensus about this prediction among the 200 scientists making up the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Less than ten of these scientists disagreed with the Panel's conclusions.

Such a rate of temperature change would cause disastrous worldwide changes. Rainfall patterns and the climate generally would change and sea level would rise at least two feet. Plant growth and crop yields would be altered dramatically.

2. Loss of Biological Diversity Plants and animals evolve and go extinct. This is natural. The up to approximately thirty million species present today are survivors of the estimated half billion species that have existed on earth. The average natural duration of a species is five million years with 900,000 going extinct every million years. As of today, humans have accelerated the rate of species extinction a hundred- to a thousand-fold, by manipulating the earth's environment. In order for the environment to best respond to rapid climate change the broadest degree of biological diversity must be available.

3. Population Growth The total world population is growing much faster than that in Western Europe and North America. After 2025, US population may even stabilize or decline. This is not the case worldwide. When looking at world population, we note that it took thirty thousand generations for world human population to reach one billion individuals. This occurred about the time of the American Revolution. During the next five generations, up to about the time I was born, world population grew by an additional billion. During my lifetime, world population has grown to 5.3 billion today. During my expected lifetime it is predicted to reach seven billion people. A growth from two to seven billion in one lifetime.

With the highly leveraged impacts from the growth in population in the developed countries, and with the impacts from the sheer numbers of people in the undeveloped countries strains will continually increase on the earth's environment and exacerbate the adverse consequences.

Of all the generations that ever lived, ours is having the most impact. Ours may be the last generation that can make the changes needed to assure human survival.

Humans have spent thirty thousand generations trying to "push back the wilderness" and "control nature". Today they can actually do it.

The actions of humans will control the destiny of the planet. How will they do this? For ill or for good? What role can the National Park Service play?

What role can Interpreters have in influencing what people do to the planet?

The role of national parks becomes more universally relevant as natural values are challenged by a growing population and as humans become more influential in deciding the future of the planet:

- National Parks are reservoirs of natural diversity.
- National Parks are bellwethers of biological change.
- Parks are places where cultural values and cultural diversity are preserved and where man's history on earth—and its diversity—are preserved.
- Parks are places where people can learn about their place in the natural and cultural world, can learn to feel comfortable about their presence on earth and can gain hope for the future.
- Parks are places where people can learn how important it is to protect all life values.
- Historic parks demonstrate to visitors that man has a real effect on human existence and survival.

Our job—your job—is to enable and enhance this learning.

How can park Interpreters and managers better empower Interpreters to convey understanding, appreciation and preservation of natural and cultural values?

First let us look at the major concerns expressed by Interpreters in the 1989 Survey of Field Interpreters:

72% of present Interpreters want to interpret as a career.
63% thought that there were not enough Interpreter jobs in the NPS.
38% identified a lack of career advancement opportunities.
20% complained about the low pay.
13% were burned out.
10% felt a lack of fulfillment.

Next let us look at the formal education of Interpreters as shown by the Survey.

72% of all Interpreters have degrees.
15% of all Interpreters have graduate degrees.
16% of those with degrees majored in History (the highest percentage).
9% of those with degrees majored in Park & Recreation.
7% of those with degrees majored in Agriculture.
5% of those with degrees majored in Physical Sciences.
5% of those with degrees majored in Biology.
19% of those with degrees majored in other fields related to NPS interpretation.
30% of those with degrees majored in fields thought not related to NPS interpretation.

My belief is that we must develop and demonstrate more and better ways to effectively and efficiently deliver more globally focused interpretive programs to the public.

Why not combine the interpretation, resource management and science functions and staff and use this augmented staff to execute resource management, interpretation and science programs, and to deliver more interpretive programs, at the highest possible level of competence, to more people?

In order to do this we must develop a high level of competence in our employees charged with carrying out these programs. We must identify proper staffing levels, training programs, and recruitment programs, for both professional and non-professional positions.

In my view an organizational problem exists.

We must **ABOLISH** wholesale use of the 025 Series for Interpreters.

Instead we should use: Science Series, Archeologist, Teacher, Audio-visual Technician, Political Scientist, Historian, etc. registers to fill Interpreter jobs. If the NPS persists in the exclusive use of the 025 Series to fill Interpreter positions in the future, there will be a serious lack of staff qualified to understand and interpret the global changes and potential for future changes in the park's and the world's natural and cultural environments. We will have missed the boat in terms of taking advantage of the ability of our Interpreters to accomplish what may be the most important mission ever of the National Park Service—to educate the public on protecting important life values.

We must **RECOGNIZE** and accept the potential (ongoing?) separation of Law Enforcement, Search and Rescue, and Fire Fighter rangers into a group of public safety employees with a twenty year retirement.

People in such a group devote most of their work day and most of their careers to these functions. They should become a distinct group from the other “rangers”.

We should **COMBINE** the professional aspects of resource management, interpretation and science functions into one function.

Under this approach the people who do the research and resource management work would also do the interpretation. Other professionals would accomplish specific other duties, e g, teachers would do the teaching (environmental education), audio-visual professional technicians would prepare professional-level video productions. Thereby, the people educating the public would be the people who intimately knew what they were talking about.

It may be critical to **IDENTIFY** GS-11 as the journeyman level of Professional Interpreter/Resource Managers.

We need to **BROADEN** our audience.

During the visitor season half of all Interpreters present between one and five formal programs a week. These person to person programs are often considered the epitome of NPS interpretation. However such programs are only given to people who are already interested in the subject matter. Often the attendees are already avid environmentalists. Instead, why not spend the time devoted to these programs to doing research, performing resource management and develop a first-rate 26 minute film? These productions could be for viewing on a visitor center video screen, in area motels on the local cable television station, and on nationwide public television. The large non-governmental organizations such as the Audubon Society and the National Geographic Society already produce such programs and so does our sister Federal agency the Smithsonian Institution. Why not the National Park Service? Could we be even more effective?

Interpreters hold a powerful key—the key to accomplishment of the National Park Service mission. This mission—for the 21st Century—is to help to enable people understand the natural and cultural world—and their place in it.

Parks are touchstones to the past, touchstones to the present and touchstones to the future. Parks present to people a simpler life, more in tune with nature—often a nostalgic reflection.

Parks can illustrate that living a simpler, less resource consumptive life, need not be a negative experience. Living a life without a heavy consumption of natural resources need not be negative. What is wrong with living in a world that is used like a National Park; man on a par with nature, man living in harmony with nature?

Interpreters **seize** the moment, **see** your role—**go** after it. Expand your traditional role. Become involved in protecting what you are interpreting. Develop your professional abilities. Get to do more responsible and effective work. And, in a not facetious way, **SAVE THE WORLD**.

Interpretation in the Future: Why Not Try the Past?

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My home telephone is almost archaic. All it does is transmit my voice and receive others'. A recent article in *The Futurist* magazine described how telephone networks of the future will be systems "that will enable users to communicate in any combination of voice, text, and video and to locate, use, and share information These changes promise to give business and individual users an array of new services that until very recently were considered possible only in the fertile imaginations of science-fiction writers." In the restaurant, car, hospital operating room—anywhere—it will be possible for us to be plugged into a communication network and a variety of receivers, converters, and processors that will allow us always to be in touch with whatever or whomever we desire. And the phone is only one of the gadgets that will revolutionize our lives: high density TV, virtual reality, genetically altered plants and animals, ever-increasing automation and robots, all sorts of simulation and animation, multi-image communication, and, of course, new "modern" computers.

I'm almost embarrassed to admit that I like my phone the way it is. I don't need, **or want**, the world's collected information at my fingertips. It seems that our thinking and decision making are already choked with more data than we can assimilate or use.

There is a troublesome question lurking behind this impending world of super-modernity, one that bears on our role as interpreters no less than on our personal lives: Are we being impelled into using these gadgets because they are things we need and want, or merely because they are or will be available? Kurt Mendelssohn of Oxford asked such a question about Egypt's pyramids:

"Five thousand years ago, for the first time in history, man had changed the skyline of his world with his own hands. There must have been tremendous pride of achievement, and in this we may perhaps find the most compelling reason for erecting pyramids. They were built because man had reached the stage at which he was able to build them."

Twenty years ago, in an article in *National Parks and Conservation Magazine*, I described my three-year-old daughter's sense of wonder and her eagerness to learn about everything around her. She would be growing up in a world of heart transplants and moon landings, things beyond her grandparents' imaginations. I wondered how she, as an adult, would relate to national parks. Would she still have that childish sense of wonder, or would she be so inured to her daily dose of scientific and technological miracles that she would be unmoved by the bedrock simplicity of the parks?

I suggested that we parks people would have a major job of communicating to her generation. If we were going to instill in them the traditional ethics and values of national parks, I thought that maybe we would need new ways to tell our stories.

These twenty years have brought technological change at an unprecedented rate. Interpretation has sometimes been swept along by the siren song of progress. Partly because we live interpreters are expensive, and partly because the latest technological breakthrough soon becomes an industry fad, park interpretation has often been entrusted to gadgets. Multiple screens, interactive video, and films that incorporate the latest Madison Avenue trends have often provided less than satisfying interpretation. Our programs have sometimes been so clever and artsy that the medium distracts from the message.

Watching the world around me these twenty years, in which this year's camcorder makes last year's obsolete, and in which we are deluged with a quantity of information that is far beyond our ability to sensibly use, I've decided that I drew the wrong question out of my three-year-old's eagerness to learn and understand. I should have asked how we in the NPS can hold fast, how we can keep the parks and our interpretation as the islands of quiet nature and sensed history that they have always been. Maybe people still come to the parks for the old, un-modern reasons, and once in the park they can be captured with the old simplicities and wonders. Maybe it is misguided to think that their park experience need replicate their electronic outside world.

The autumn 1988 issue of this magazine dealt with interpretation as magic and creativity and provocation. A few of the contributors, trying to describe how those things happen, spoke of movies and exhibits, but almost all of them equated the best interpretation they had experienced with an interpreter's personal performance, with her contact with a visitor. Somehow, they implied, high-tech gadgets seem to miss that magic that live rangers evoke.

Bill Brown said it well in the summer 1989 issue, in which he contrasts real talking to visitors with "mechanized, standardized, impersonal interpretation," to "interpreters' responding to a visitor's question by pointing to a button." When interpretation consists of device-media products, Brown says, "design, flash, and hyperbole substitute for substance and the simple profundities of the park."

Today, as we weigh the high-tech gadgetry that the future will provide, and wonder if that is the future of interpretation, I suggest that we remember what park interpretation is capable of doing to us, park interpretation like I heard on the tour bus at Lyndon B

Johnson National Historical Park. There, riding along the banks of the Pedernales River, former President Johnson's voice talked about that river and his ranch, of the surrounding Texas Hill Country. He was describing his native land, the place that had molded him, of what they had meant to him, man and boy. I left with a greater understanding of that controversial man, almost as if I had a personal conversation with him. To me, that was magic and creativity and provocation.

By way of contrast, I recently found a computerized direction machine at an airport Hertz counter. At my typed-in request, I received a two-page printout, directing me to the main highway in one-tenth of a mile pieces. It was complicated, and not very clear. When I asked the attendant for help, she said, "Go out the main airport exit, stay to the right to the stop sign, then go left for two miles to the highway." Score one for a live person!

I think that I was on the wrong track twenty years ago in thinking that we would have to evolve new, more modern means of communication for new generations. Now, I don't believe that the VCRs and hand-held computers and magic phones they have at home dull their ability to feel wonder at their parks. Maybe that electronic world makes them all the more receptive to the kind of interpretation we have always been so good at. After all, they still come to the parks because they **aren't** home.

Choose carefully among the scientific wonders that will be available to you for interpreting the parks. "They built pyramids because they could" shouldn't be a rationale for substituting high-tech gadgetry for what we have always done. The national park experience is still a wondrous thing, and traditional interpretation is still the best way to convey "the simple profundities of the park."

To Build a Fire: Computers or Oak?

Daniel O Murphy
Interpretive Specialist
Southwest Region

To judge by the whirlpool I've been in the last few weeks, "Futures" has an eight syllable synonym: incredible technology. By chance, several new (to me) technological applications need to be worked on at once, and I'm staggering beneath a load of new words, ideas and, occasionally, new horizons.

But that's not what I meant to write about. Actually I'm a little worried over how we'll handle high tech. It's fiendishly effective, and extremely clever people in industry are working every day to do a high tech effect better than the next guy. And their budgets! Your park's annual budget **might** buy thirty seconds somewhere, where a car turns into a woman, then a bird, finally a smiling dealer. With the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra for background.

Maybe it's the frustration of trying to teach an old brain new tricks, but I admit it; I'm overwhelmed. I know new rangers just coming out of college have a big head start on me, but I see them racing to keep up too. People have a new set of expectations from interpretation, because the economics of mass communications means every visitor who comes in the door has been on a diet of in-

credible graphics and effects from some truly formidable producers. Then they come into our park.

I'm worried that if we don't step carefully, we could unthinkingly slide into a competition we don't have a chance of winning. The budgets, the time to work on it, the media—when it comes to high tech communications, if we let it even look like we're panting after the gang out there in front, the deck is stacked against us.

We don't **have** to jump into the competition. If I had to footrace against a man in a sports car I'd make sure I selected the course—perhaps a ladder. We can change the rules of the game. The secret we have, that any advertiser envies us for, is this: we have “the real thing.” We **have** the splendid mountain, complete with carefully matched wildlife, sunsets and mosquitos; we **have** the president's cabin, complete with genuine presidential socks. We don't need to hologram it. An audience accustomed to fantastic Pepsi cola ads might find refreshing a plain old ranger, with a plain old slide projector or maybe just talking at the campfire—but by God, that's the real mountain right behind him, and there are things out there that go bump in the night! “REAL—It's Refreshing!”

By now you are snorting at my cheap writer's trick of the excluded middle; drawing a case in stark black and white, either high tech or not high tech, in order to reach the conclusion I wanted. Dave Wright and I had this conversation once and Dave pointed out the obvious, that in each case you choose the medium best for that job, and sometimes it will be high tech. The Johnstown Flood film is fantastic, and probably the ideal medium right there. And right now this region is involved in some pretty neat high-tech things with HFC. What I worry about in coming years is the tendency to think high tech is what we really want, only when the budget hurts we have to say “Aw Shucks” and carry some photos in an envelope in our nature walk daypack. My point is, the “homey” solution to a problem is a viable alternative in its own right. It's not just what you back up to when you can't do the razzmatazz, and hope it turns out OK. It's always a legitimate alternative, and sometimes the best one. In days to come I'll visit parks (Don't you hate it when retirees come in and kibitz?) and will see and love interpretive techniques no one's thought of yet; but I'd sure hate to miss the campfire, or have a new ranger miss the experience of doing it.

One morning in a New Orleans sidewalk cafe where I was murdering my per diem I saw the rich man next to me pass up the Shirred Eggs with Oysters and choose oatmeal instead. Maybe he liked the genuine substance of it.

The Future of Interpretation

William Penn Mott, Jr
Special Assistant to the
Regional Director
Western Region

Mark Twain in commenting on civilizing the American West wrote “First comes the poor immigrant with ax and hoe and rifle; then the trader; next the miscellaneous rush; next the gambler; the desperado; the highway man and all their kindred as seen in both sexes; and next, the smart chap who has bought up an old grant that covers all the land; this brings the lawyers; the vigilante committee brings in the undertaker; all these interests brings the

newspaper; the newspaper starts up politics and a railroad; all hands turn to and build a church and a jail and a store and a park, and, behold, civilization is established forever in the land". I might add civilization brings more and more people with their business and industry and, behold, the beautiful rural country side is changed to a city of concrete and asphalt and the natural resources are lost forever.

Statistics indicate that by the year 2020, ninety percent of the population of this country will be living in 13 metropolitan centers: San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, New York City, Houston, Philadelphia, etc. These city folks will have little or no understanding of the wild natural out-of-doors or of their responsibility to protect and preserve the natural and cultural values found there in. This shift from a rural to an urban population makes the need for interpretation/education very important. It is not only the local environmental problems that people must be made aware of but the global environmental issues such as acid rain, the greenhouse effect, piercing of the ozone layer, and biological diversity. These problems are so critical that their understanding and management must be given the highest priority. If these global environmental problems are not brought under control, life on this planet may not exist by the close of the 21st century.

There is a growing interest on the part of the public in conservation and in the environment that is encouraging, but to stop the destruction of the environment will require change; a change in our life style; a change in how we manage our limited resources; a change in our priorities; and a change in our thinking from short to long term objectives. We must recognize and accept these changes no matter how subtle, and we must have the flexibility and creativity to meet the changes and turn their potential liabilities into assets. It will not be easy nor will it be inexpensive. Changes are never easy, but if we do not make these changes, we will destroy the environment and then we will have lost everything.

The shift in this country from a rural to an urban population and from an agrarian to an industrial economy makes the need for interpretation/education even more important.

Each of these issues will require change and will probably raise the cost of living.

A massive educational/interpretive program will be necessary if the public is to understand these problems and provide the support needed to solve and manage them.

The National Park Service cannot do it alone. We must cooperate with local, regional and state interpreters and with teachers and other land management organizations and mount a comprehensive coordinated educational effort. Resource managers, research scientists and interpreters need to work together. The work, papers, and reports of scientists need to be translated into material that can be presented to the public by interpreters and teachers in simple understandable terms. Resource managers, more than ever, need the research and information that the scientists develop so that they can make the correct decisions that will protect and preserve the natural and cultural resources for future generations to enjoy.

Without research, decisions on how to manage our limited finite

resources may err. Our options are becoming less and less. We cannot, as we move into the 21st century, err in our decisions.

Nobel prize winning scientists last year were men working in the microscopic world of cells so small that it takes trillions of them to make a human being. Such research is helping scientist and doctors to understand the way the human body functions that will make it possible for them to cure some of the very serious diseases that have plagued mankind. The same attention must be given to the environment or its malfunctioning will destroy life on this planet.

Scientists, resource managers and interpreters must work together as a team. It is not just the city dwellers to which interpreters must direct their teaching, but they must be concerned with the increase in the number of senior citizens, single parent families, dual income families and immigrants from countries whose life style and attitude toward the out-of-doors and the natural and cultural resources are quite different from ours. These challenges suggest to me that interpreters need to work closely with research scientists in order to present to visitors to the parks the information and facts that will make them aware of not only the local environmental problems but the global environmental issues we face. We cannot carry out this interpretation/education alone. We must join with land managers, and interpreters at all levels of government, in an extensive educational program if we expect to save this planet for future generations to enjoy.

Interpretation should be taken out of the realm of entertainment. It must become the serious business of education. I am not suggesting that we eliminate entertainment, but all too often interpretive programs have as their primary objective entertaining people. Entertainment should not be the end product but it can be a means toward the end product which should be education.

The future holds great promises if interpreters, scientists and resource managers work together as a team in the preservation of our natural and cultural resources. We must join with other land managing agencies and teachers in a coordinated integrated environmental educational thrust. It can make a difference and save life on this planet and build a land and resource ethic that will, as Aldo Leopold once said, make us see the land as a community to which we belong.

Future of Interpretation

Jerry Y Shimoda
Superintendent
Pu'uhonua o Honaunau NHP
and Puukohola Heiau NHS

There is no other way to say it than to say, the future of interpretation looks bright. That is, provided the interpreters keep a few common denominators in mind.

From the point of view of the site, there's a story to tell. That's why each site was built or set apart in the first place. Common sense? Then why is the interpretive staff the smallest? The second common denominator is that each site has an ambience. If the ambience makes people uncomfortable, they will not come again, unless they know it's deliberate, such as that of the Haunted Man-

sion in Disneyland. If the ambience of a site makes people feel good, interpreters need to be trained to maintain that ambience or to enhance it, through their behavior. Sure, everybody knows that. Then why isn't it being done?

More people go to football games, baseball games, basketball games, demolition derbies, and triathlons than parks, museums, Museum Association meetings, Natural Resources Conferences, and Bio-Diversity Conferences. Of course, I'm not suggesting that "we go Disneyland" to attract visitors. In fact, I'm not saying that we attract visitors, but we should do a good job as interpreters, bearing in mind, common denominators. There's those words again.

Spectacular areas, in themselves, naturally draw crowds—Great Smoky Mountains, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Yosemite. Independence Hall, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, the Statue of Liberty, Colonial National Historical Park, the USS *Arizona* Memorial symbolize great moments in United States history, and the spirit of FREEDOM. People like to be awed, yes, even in historical areas and museums. They like to see, touch, smell, taste, hear, and "feel" the spirit of the site. However, they want to do it themselves, and not have an aggressive interpreter tell him or her how to do it. They just want to be nudged, not pushed.

There is a story that the Chinese philosopher, Confucius, had two disciples. One concluded that humans, by nature, are evil; the other said that humans are by nature, good. Taking this a step farther, we can say that humans are, by nature, hard working, and humans, are by nature, lazy. We all have these traits, these common denominators. It's just that one dominates over the other at different times in our lives. Strangely, we even have to work at being lazy. But working hard takes a bit more effort and self-discipline. Unfortunately, self-discipline is not a common denominator among all people.

Part of the self-discipline is writing down objectives. In this case, objectives for the interpretive program. The Roman Philosopher, Seneca, said about 2000 years ago, "If a man does not know what harbor he is sailing for, no wind is the right wind." Interpretive objectives should be written from the viewpoint of the visitor enjoyment or appreciation, not, how we're going to make the visitor enjoy this site.

In this age of "Future Shock" and "The Third Wave" as Alvin Toffler calls it, the need for sound objectives and techniques become more and more important. Minds of our citizens are confused, and guests are visiting our country from everywhere. And yet, within this maelstrom is a shining light—an area of stability that's provided by the security of a good home, and sanctuaries such as monasteries, museums, parks, lofty mountains, and clear running brooks. These are areas that serve as a contrast from the merry-go-rounds, the Los Angeles freeways, and stock car races.

Most people need to make the choice, in their own minds, of going to a football game or rock concert, or, sitting quietly and watching a rippling brook. Human emotions cover a wide range, and we all have them—whether we're young or old, from the jungles of deepest Africa or from New York City. We all have the emotions of joy, anger, sadness, warmth. They are powerful ingredients in the

make-up of humans. They are what drives us, and are our common denominators.

Even the race car driver seeks periods of solitude and tranquillity, subconsciously. This, I believe, after thirty-three years in the business, and this tranquillity, I believe, a good interpreter can provide. It's not just the thrill of being in a particular park or museum but helping the visitor to enjoy a solitary flower, or a Picasso, or, merely pointing it out, without saying anything.

Visitors stream through the parks and museums, herded like cattle, and when a few of them manage to break away to smell the flowers or take a closer look at a mounted bird, someone should be there to guide them to other experiences.

Even for the so-called "mindless hordes" each park, each museum, each historic building, offers its own ambience. Most visitors are able to feel ambience even when entering in a crowd. It's easy for visitors to feel ambience when they enter a site at a quiet moment. For those who profess not to feel it, the interpreter's technique comes into play. The most common technique would be to quiet the group, and play the game of, "close your eyes," "listen," and "how do you feel?" Even if a group is from another country and does not speak our language, this technique can work through their escort-translator. If there is no one to translate, sign language can be amazingly effective.

In the future, there will be a greater need for the personal touch by interpreters, and for them to understand cultural differences, not for the purpose of "boxing" people, but so that there can be better communications. One of the first things should be to read up on world history and geography. Most of the foreign visitors coming to this country have studied American History. They can tell you about George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. What can we tell them about Jimmu Tenno or Kemal Ataturk? I remember the time when the International Park Seminar started. We had an Israeli and an Arab scheduled to be roommates. Fortunately, the error was caught in time.

As interpreters, we need to be aware that visitors from foreign countries are fairly well educated. They are not stupid; they just don't happen to understand English. Remember, too, that they are not deaf. Raising the volume of one's voice does not lead to better comprehension.

In the next few years, there will be a tremendous increase in visitation to our sites by Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and older Americans, like the information explosion that's going on today. Guam is an example of how an island has had to become bi-cultural practically overnight, because of the tremendous increase in tourism from Japan. Eighty percent of Guam's visitors are Japanese. There are signs and publications in English and Japanese, everywhere. The hotel employees are being trained in the Japanese language and culture two days a week.

In Hawaii, the percentages of visitors from Japan, Germany, and England are increasing at a faster rate than those from the United States mainland. In number, however, those from the United States mainland is still much greater. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Japanese spend about five times more, on the

average, than the visitors from the mainland or Canada. The Japanese language is being taught more and more in schools and hotels in Hawaii, and publications are appearing in Japanese, Spanish, German, and French. The Spanish speaking people are largely from the American Southwest, Mexico, and Central and South America.

We, Americans, have always been proud, subconsciously, that we are a monolingual and monocultural society, and that we are not on the metric system. But the tide is changing. We need to change with the world. This is especially true in interpretation. Watch the Canadians and the Japanese. They are coming up with programs that make the visitors feel good; that titillate their emotions in the language they understand.

In the United States, more people will be speaking Spanish than English, fairly soon, and yet, many parks and museums don't have a single Spanish speaking employee on the staff. In Hawaii and Guam, I am not aware of any Japanese speaking employee, except in our park. I'm not aware of any in the Western, Pacific Northwest, or Alaska Regional Offices, but I know the Hawaii Visitors Bureau employs several. For whatever it's worth, we have instituted a Tourism Japanese workshop in our park for our employees to communicate better with the visitors from Japan.

Service people in this country, and that includes interpreters, are not considered very courteous by people from other countries. I frequently hear the phrase, "What do you expect, they're Americans." Service people have forgotten common courtesies and getting back at the visitor or one upmanship seem to have become popular. Very rarely do you hear an interpreter saying, "Good morning sir, welcome," or, "How are you, sir"? We frequently hear, "Maw nin, How ya doin"? "Where you from"? "First trip here"? Interpreters should listen to themselves. The greeting is a critical area because that's where the stage for the visitor's visit is set. Courtesy is a common denominator that anyone from anywhere understands.

Some of us may remember what happened at Miami Beach and Puerto Rico a few years ago. Visitors simply stopped going there. Miami Beach subsequently countered with a program called, "Miami Nice". But why do things have to get to that state before changes are made? Interpreters today, and of the future, must keep the "good for the visitor" in mind, and treat them as they would want to be treated.

A good way to observe service dynamics is to see a successful restaurant operation. You'll notice that it involves everything from parking, to what happens as soon as you enter the door, how you're treated inside by the maitre d', waiters, bus boys, the promptness of the service, the cleanliness of the facility, and the noise control in the restaurant and the kitchen. The restaurant business **is** a service business. If the service is good, the customer will forgive a lot of things. So too, with interpreters and parks, sites and museums. But this is not to say that quality of programs should be overlooked.

Whether we like it or not, we're in the hospitality business. Once the visitor comes into our facility, the bottom line is courtesy and friendliness, to make the visitor feel good and comfortable so she or he will get into a receptive mood. To use an old expression, "Cour-

tesy is the hook.” But friendliness does not mean calling a **stranger** by his first name.

It’s important to keep in mind that most people today are in a hurry, and following their own priorities and agenda. It’s your job as an interpreter to **help** them re-set their priorities or agenda. For example, your park may have been ear-marked for only a 15-minute stop. Only you, can help him or her to want to stay longer. Even if a visitor is with a bus group, you can exert some influence on the individual or the whole group. If the visitor feels good in your area or site, he’s going to want to stay longer to experience your area or want to learn more about it. In our park, one indicator is the fact that we receive more money in our donation box than some of the larger parks.

I remember old Dusty Miller who worked as an interpreter at Petrified Forest National Park many years ago. He could hold people spellbound just explaining the park folder. It’s our job to make people stop and listen, by adjusting our behavior, accordingly.

In 1964, my family and I went by train from Albany, New York, to Los Angeles, California. On one of the legs, there was a porter who had obviously mastered the art of courtesy and friendliness. My wife and I watched with fascination at the smoothness of his operation.—“Yes sir! Yes Ma’am!”, “May I get you a pillow?”, “May I help you with that bag?” Of course, he was raking in tips left and right, and I’m sure his tips far outweighed his salary. However, I’m not suggesting that interpreters operate in a manner just for what he or she can get out of the visitor, but rather that visitors should be treated courteously and in a friendly manner, and if the site benefits financially from it, so be it.

Interpretation can no longer “fly by the seat of its pants.” Training has to be instituted that covers everything from telephone answering techniques to courteous and friendly treatment of visitors.

Once the visitor is put into a receptive mode, information on the site can be given by the interpreters using the technique expounded by the Greek biographer Plutarch: “The mind is a flame to be kindled, not a vessel to be filled.” Most people like to be mentally challenged. This is true for people all over the world. We need to use more of that technique in interpretation.

Another universal characteristic seems to be, “What’s in it for me.” That’s the reason, I believe, people want to participate in game shows on television. Interpreters need to watch trends in television programming, get information from the travel industry as to who’s coming to our regions, read books such as *The Third Wave*, *Megatrends*, *Megatrends 2000*, and books on countries where the bulk of our visitors are coming from.

If my statements sound harsh, at times, they are meant to be because of the urgency for interpreters to realize that we are in the information era, and there is much happening rapidly, and much confusion in the minds of our visitors as to what is worthwhile and what is not worthwhile. We interpreters need to realize that we are in control of the program which can bring us more funding. Instead of wringing our hands and lamenting our lack of funds, we must take control and develop programs from the point of view of our visitors using common human relationship techniques that have ex-

isted from the time of the cave people. Someone once said that we may be modern and sophisticated, but scratch modern man, and you'll find a cave man. People are all humans in this world, and there are common denominators that can be used to reach all people, now and in the future, be they Eskimos, Blacks, French, Slovak, Indian, or Japanese. Interpreters need to spread the message that we all need to work together to prevent wars and global tragedies, and make the world a better place in which to live. After all, interpreters are teachers and that will never change, now and in the future.

The Future Is the Here and Now: Seize the Opportunity

Mark Herberger
Park Naturalist
Big Bend National Park

A young couple and their baby came by the ranger station recently in order to check on some of the typical visitor inquiries: current road conditions, camping information, and interpretive activities. As if I were the Director, they took the opportunity to say thanks for the national parks. The new parents spoke of vistas, resource protection, a job well done, and a place to which their son will always be able to return. While the couple talked, a fleeting moment of *deja vu* passed by and they too seemed similarly familiar with the park. I then remembered the family from last season; their baby had just been born and they were introducing him to the park. This time the young couple was returning for their first anniversary. They couldn't imagine a better place to celebrate the memorable occasions of their life—almost like a second home. I smiled with delight for having shared in the joy of their return and in the reality of the words “to conserve for future generations.” Have you ever noticed that this type of “homecoming-of-sorts” happens fairly often. Couples, young and old, increasingly mention how they observe personal anniversaries in the parks, returning year after year after year. For them—a special time, at a special place.

In 1991 (of course) another anniversary arrives. On August 25 the National Park Service will be 75 years young. This “birthday” of the Park Act of 1916 is an occasion we can all celebrate. As with events of such dignity, this diamond anniversary can be a time to reflect on our past (as an agency and as interpreters within the agency) and to look forward to our future.

Frederick Olmsted Jr's composition, which was used to create the Park Act, not only serves as a conduit linking past, present, and future actions; its words have stirred minds over the years. The Act is the framework for what the national park units are. It has become a model for what other nations' parks are trying to be. People debate its wording and analyze its meaning. In conservation circles, our Park Service mandate is perhaps one of the most widely discussed pieces of legislation.

So in 1991 if you ever wonder why you are here, wonder what it is all about, or maybe even what the future holds, here is a little reminder, compliments of Frederick Junior:

...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and

the wildlife therein, and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

Among the many points of interest to me when I recall the Act of 1916 is the “...” just before “to conserve.” What precedes the words we always hear of and read about? That beginning of the sentence in Section 1 of the Organic Act reads:

The Service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations hereinafter specified by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of said parks, monuments and reservations, which purpose is to conserve...

Perhaps in a way, we have been reciting what the park units are all about. In another way, maybe we can gain a look at what the Service’s function is all about—“to promote and regulate.” So in addition to the discussions, the debates, and the analysis of who we are and where the future lies, ponder that word “promote.” Promote; **as through interpretation?**

By law then, the national park areas have extraordinary responsibilities. Future generations—as in forever—is a long, long time! Only the highest level of resource protection will ensure the opportunity, for young couples, not-so-young couples, and babies just entering the front gate, to enjoy the parks in the state, and for the purpose for which they were set aside. Equally, as interpreters within the organization, our role for the future carries with it the same magnitude of responsibility. The importance of interpretation to the future survival of the parks has been well published. The National Parks and Conservation Association, for example, states that without strong, active, visible, and vocal public participation in the various activities affecting the national park system, it will be difficult for the national parks to survive intact. They ask, “How can the public be expected to care for or defend the parks if it is unaware of their needs?” Interpretation builds that awareness — it **promotes** what the park areas are all about! Almost four decades ago, in a memo from Conrad Wirth, the Director outlined various ways in which interpretation aids park conservation and he illustrated that the interpretive program has a real obligation and opportunity, based on law and policy, to contribute to preservation of the areas. Director Wirth’s penned words of the early 1950s show wise counsel and foresight. Could we not say that the future of his memo, “Securing Protection and Conservation Objectives through Interpretation,” has arrived in the early 1990s?

Of course, the parks and the NPS get their authority to conserve, promote, and regulate from another “law”—the Constitution. One of the six principles that founded the federal republic is “to ensure domestic tranquility.” According to a past Chief Scientist of the NPS, “Congress and the President fulfilled, in part, their obligation to ensure domestic tranquility when they created the National Park Service. The enabling acts, the Park Act of 1916, the Antiquities Act, The National Park System Act, are all grants of Federal power to the National Park Service to perform.”

To achieve such ambitious and important goals—to conserve, to promote and regulate, to ensure domestic tranquility (wow!)—inter-

preters encounter various multi-faceted issues as we bridge yesterday and today with tomorrow. In this magazine's introduction Glen Kaye says that "good interpreters reflexively think a great deal about the future" and other articles in this *Interpretation* reflect such diversity—in thinkers and in thought. But each issue we encounter is accompanied by a legion of questions, each of which requires debate and analysis. We face the issue of the Ranger Work Force Plan with questions of classification and career advancement. We face the issue of *The Interpretive Challenge* with questions of professional excellence and program evaluation. We face the issue of "Endangered Rangers" with the questions of morale and adequate pay. We face the issue of the 21st Century with questions of resource expertise and expanding roles. We face the issue of Position Management with questions of training and of being competent supervisors. We face ... well a lot.

If it is possible to look beyond these trimmings of the bureaucracy, the future of interpretation becomes a bit clearer and a bit closer. The future of interpretation lies in the here and now. It lies in the capabilities and willingness of the individual within each of us. We have the blessing of laws, the direction of guidelines such as NPS 6, and the critical advice of overseers to do the job that needs to be accomplished. In "The Role of Interpretation in Park Management," the author summarized that, "the (interpretation) division ought to be the manager's principal link with the public, the translators of his or her resource management decisions. And still it ought to be the division in charge of mystery and magic, the holders of the secrets of the parks." As our audience has grown in sophistication and diversified in needs, so has the interpretive agenda. Identifying a flower, a geologic layer, or an historic structure has a place in interpretation, but it is no longer interpretation. The days of "point-and-yack" are disappearing. In this age of global change and major impacts affecting park resources, interpretation expands beyond providing entertainment and enjoyment for the audience—it reaches toward enriching their minds and spirits—it provokes responsible action in natural and cultural resource conservation—it is like holding up a mirror to their future. A paper called "The Role & Responsibility of Interpretation in the 1980s" states that "programs that are entertaining but not truly relevant to the area's primary themes and resources belong in amusement parks, not national parks." Well, perhaps a little brusque but fitting.

So for the here and now, and ultimately the future, we have the opportunity, and obligation, to continue to perform and to promote. Interpretation is too powerful a tool not to. As Tom Schulman would say via Professor John Keating via Robin Williams, "Carpe Diem." "Seize the day!" We must not be stifled by the issues surrounding us, by the unanswered questions, by all of the trimmings. We must, however, make those decisions that only "we" can—the personal ones; the decisions to accept and take the calculated risks, to assure professionalism in ourselves, to provide honest self criticism, to evolve top gun services—to initiate answers for the issues. We must seize the opportunity and make it right. And of course, let us not forget the modest advice from our friend Freeman Tilden that "the best interpretation comes from the heart and is laced with ... personal commitment."

On this occasion of our anniversary as a Service, isn't it fitting that

the national park areas are places where others' anniversaries can be celebrated; domestic tranquility at its finest. Let us all make sure that for the future, young couples, not so young couples, and babies, can always find the National Park System such a special place.

The Future of Nature Centers in the National Park Service

Beth Hagler-Martin
Chief Park Interpreter
Chickasaw National
Recreation Area

We must set aside land and develop special places where attitudes can be shaped. The aim of nature centers is just that and I only wish we had many more of them.

—Roger Tory Peterson

The psychologist Eleanor Duckworth teaches that “all kinds of things are hidden from us—even though they may surround us—unless we know how to reach out for them ourselves”. Our nature center seeks to promote the emotional, physical and intellectual linkages of people, especially young children, to nature. We are dedicated to nurturing their appreciation and caring for wild places and wild things in a manner that will foster a lifetime commitment to the protection of nature. Nature centers provide the sites and facilities for this crucial bonding to take place. Nature centers are the training grounds for many of our finest young naturalists. They are invaluable.

The mission of the Travertine Nature Center (in Chickasaw National Recreation Area) is a complex one. As a unit of the National Park System we are bound to preserve and protect the park's resources “for all to enjoy”. As naturalists, we are compelled to study the world around us, to be informed of the changes and the most current theories concerning the “state of the park”. As interpreters and teachers, we are resolved to teach park visitors not only about the beauty and curiosities within a but, also about the problems facing the park, the planet and all of its inhabitants. As citizens, we are obliged to set a good example for our neighbors and our community.

Pretty heavy responsibilities for an operation which, like many, is underfunded and understaffed. What we lack in funding and staffing however, we make up in commitment, optimism and energy. The staff of the Travertine Nature Center truly believes in their work and their conviction that “we can change the world”.

...a vast network of nature centers and outdoor classrooms should be established...” where people “can learn by direct experience the essentials that underlie environmental quality.

—Laurance Rockefeller

Nature centers, public and private, have a potential for educational service beyond that presently known and employed by our society. Communication between center managers, as well as with the public, is not what it could be. Centers across the country, new and established, share so much in common, but seem to fall short in their ability to truly exchange and enjoy these commonalities. NPS

nature centers and environmental education centers should take an active role in this networking. Professional organizations such as the National Association for Interpreters and the Roger Tory Peterson Institute are excellent means of communication with other naturalists and interpreters.

Collaboration among centers and partnerships with local school systems need greater levels of funding and program guidance than is presently available. The National Assessment of Educational Progress reported in its 1986 survey of pre-college educational attainments that "young people graduating from high school are found to be increasingly deficient in understanding basic scientific facts and principles." Specifically, elementary school teachers devote absolute minimum classroom time to science study. If we expect students to graduate from high school with sufficient knowledge of natural processes to assume responsibilities as citizens, we need to do all we can to improve the study of science. Viable connections between nature centers and schools work to this end.

Support from Congress may be forthcoming. A recent article in the American Association of Museums' publication *Aviso*, highlights Congressional efforts at promoting national science literacy. Earlier this year Senator Edward Kennedy introduced S 2114, the Excellence in Math, Science, Engineering Education Act of 1990. Its goal is to make American students first in the world in math science and engineering by the year 2000. The bill's co-sponsor is Senator Mark Hatfield. Representative George Brown introduced another version of the bill to the House of Representatives last year which would "make science museum services more widely available" through a National Science Foundation program.

But nature centers should educate adults as well as school aged children. The programs offered in an environmental education program or programs for the general public should address environmental concerns to all visitors.

Nature centers are in more of a leadership role in the community as we progress into the new environmental age. At the Travertine Nature Center, for example, in response to the growing number of requests for information regarding environmental concerns, we have modified many of our programs. We offer a series of programs under the general heading of "Living the Green Life," which include such topics as home water conservation, air quality control, recycling programs at home and in the community, and energy conservation strategies.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing nature centers is interpreting the wide variety of information being propelled at the public today. The environmental age of the nineties brings with it many unanswered questions concerning our world. As interpreters, we are taught to present the whole story, not merely parts of the whole. The problems we face are numerous and diverse. Many of the parts of the story are unknown to us; many "experts" disagree on the various parts; new parts are continuously presenting themselves. Add to this the continued interest in subjects ranging from planets to plant succession and you can imagine the enormous task facing all nature centers and environmental education programs.

Facing everyday the issues of biodiversity, acid rain, the green-

house effect, and solid waste, park naturalists must present an optimistic attitude to which visitors can relate. Nature centers must inform the public of environmental concerns while offering alternatives. Visitors receiving a balanced message are more likely to take action than those receiving biased messages

Thank goodness nature centers still offer a way for people to enjoy an old fashioned nature walk or campfire program. With all of the attention on “environmental issues” today, sometimes it is a relief to escape with a magnifying glass or binoculars and a field guide. After all, that’s why our visitors come to us, to relax, to escape and to explore.

I'll interpret the rocks, learn the language of flood, storm, and the avalanche. I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can.

—John Muir, Yosemite Valley, March 1871

Big Thicket Takes on the Future

Beth Houseman
Park Ranger/Interpreter
Big Thicket National
Preserve

When I arrived at Big Thicket National Preserve last February, I was ready to “take on the masses.” Being close to Houston and Dallas, I expected many people would be waiting at the trailhead for the ranger to arrive and lead them on the program. That vision dissipated during my first weekend of programs as all four programs were “no shows.” I thought it was me—“the Curse of Beth.” But it wasn’t...

Big Thicket has always been a challenge to interpreters. The Preserve’s 86,000 acres are divided into twelve separate units, which are spread out over 3,600 square miles. Having a park so extended means your visitors are spread out too. The Preserve designation means we can’t clear trees and build a campground. Even though we’re 16 years old we still don’t have a visitor center, which makes it difficult to attract first-time visitors who are seeking information. We currently use a small, historic cabin a few miles off a two-lane highway as an information station. Because of our situation, we needed to change from a program designed for a traditional, “destination park” and create our own style of program. With this change, interpretation at Big Thicket entered a new era.

By Reservation Only, Please

Our first step was to put an end to the “no shows.” To get the word out we created a newsletter and site bulletin announcing the change and listing the programs we offered. These were posted on park bulletin boards and released to local media to get the message out to the visitors, the majority of who live locally. Now, all programs are by reservation only, made through the information station. This involves some long range scheduling, but ensures that our time is spent more productively and not at deserted trail heads.

Targeting Specific Audiences

One of the problems was that many visitors may have already seen our programs. At our information station thirty percent of the

visitors are repeaters. Including these people in the design of our new interpretive plan and creating different levels of programs gave us a way to reach out to new audiences. By using **introductory level** programs we can attract new visitors who will then want to attend **advanced level** programs and broaden their knowledge. Our ultimate goal is to bring the visitor to the third level of **visitor involvement** in the Preserve's operations and community environmental issues.

The introductory program we concentrated most on this past summer was the Cooks Lake Boat Tour. The boat tour is ideal for people that are "scared" of wildlife and haven't visited the Preserve. After all, there are four species of poisonous snakes, ticks with Lyme Disease or Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, chiggers, fire ants, wasps and hornets, poison ivy, and year-round mosquitoes. The free boat tours with cushioned seats, a shade covering, and ice water had an overwhelming response and proved to be a great introductory program. The ranger on board can tell the captive audience about our other programs—and folks get to see that even though the Big Thicket does occasionally bite, it's still a fascinating place to explore.

We identified certain groups of visitors and created new programs aimed at their specific interests. For example, the largest portion of visitors are local hunters. The state of Texas provides us with the best way to get their attention: a required hunter education class. Big Thicket hunters sign up for permits on specified days, so advertising the classes will be easy. And during hunter education we can advertise our introductory Big Thicket programs (some are ideal for hunters' widows).

The advanced level programs are being created for wildflower enthusiasts, bird watchers, amateur photographers, and hikers. We will sponsor workshops on bird identification, wildflower photography, and wildflower identification and plan on bringing these workshops to a higher level by offering consecutive classes on related topics. The first advanced level workshop series will feature courses on outdoor photography. Different instructors will teach camera and film selection, picture composition, macro-photography, wildlife photography, and developing processes.

The biggest thrust in our advanced level programs will be through a new environmental education plan. Within a hundred mile radius of the Preserve there are 116 independent school districts just waiting for us. We will start with early elementary students and have them return each year for the next grade's program. As students take what they learned home with them, this positive reinforcement should pay off as we see values change in support of the environment. As folks drive past the local petrochemical refineries they might not say "Ah! The smell of money!" but instead be more aware of the chemicals being released into the air and water.

Success of our program can be measured by the number of individuals and groups who attend our introductory or advanced level programs and then participate in a visitor involvement level program. In a Park Improvement Project visitors help with construction or maintenance of trails (many of which were built by volunteers). The local scouts are steady participants at these programs since many meet the requirements for earning a badge.

They earn a Take Pride in America/Catch the Scouting Spirit patch for a longer term project that leaves a lasting impression on the Preserve (such as building a bridge on a trail).

Others prefer to participate in our Volunteer In Parks program since it offers them the chance to assist on boat tours, staff the information station, work with school groups, lead Park Improvement Projects, contribute to our slide file, help with office work, and organize our library. This gives many a chance to share their unique talents while providing support for the park. We hope that as interest in the park grows our Volunteer program will expand out to the surrounding communities, which have only just begun to be environmentally concerned.

Marketing Our Program

Tourism is at last being recognized for its potential to boost the economy of southeast Texas, which has been in a slump since the bottom dropped out of the oil industry. Although local sentiment was originally against the creation of the National Preserve, many park neighbors are beginning to realize the importance of the protected area, both ecologically and economically. Using a non-personal approach, we are taking steps to market ourselves at areas that attract tourists. A portable exhibit, displayed at festivals and events, features color photographs of the Preserve. A larger exhibit is being designed inside a trailer that can be moved easily to outlying festivals. A park newspaper is being developed which will be sent to Texas highway "Welcome Centers," Chamber of Commerce, and individuals requesting information on the Preserve. And short articles are being written for area newspapers, the first of which focused on early settlers to the area. Recently, the Beaumont Convention and Visitors Bureau chose the Big Thicket for a brochure cover photo — quite an accomplishment since the city prides itself for being "The Museum Capital of Texas."

In the future, as more people visit parks closer to home, these parks may have to make similar changes to meet the needs of their specific audiences. A plan designed for a traditional park may not work at a non-traditional park as we found out. As we take our first steps we can already see increases in program attendance. We are excited about the future of interpretation at Big Thicket.

About This Issue

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Summer 1991: Interpreting the National Park Service During Its Diamond Jubilee

Andy Kardos, Harpers Ferry Center

Russ Smith, Mid-Atlantic Region

Fall 1991: Interpreting the Columbus Quincentenary

Glen Kaye, Southwest Region

Bill Springer, Southeast Region

Editor's Note

Your editors respectfully solicit the contribution of articles from the readers for forthcoming issues of *Interpretation*. If you wish to submit an article for consideration, please contact one of the Contributing Editors identified under the subject issue.

In order to make *Interpretation* more truly a forum for the exchange of ideas among interpreters, we will include a selection of responses to articles in the form of Letters to the Editors. Please submit all letters to:

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