

Interpretation



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The National Park Service mission to preserve and protect the resources entrusted to our care becomes increasingly complex and demanding. Witness the recent oil spill in Alaska, an event that has tested every research, resource management, and interpretive skill we are able to apply. The time is past when the disciplines of Interpretation, Research, and Resource Management may reside securely in their own niche without a productive relationship that is dynamic and rewarding to each. Coming to Alaska in 1986 brought this home to me. Stretched in thin ranks over millions of acres of park lands it became clear that the three disciplines must serve one another to preserve and protect irreplaceable natural and cultural resources. Now we must persistently confront and cooperate with one another to enrich all. Research seeks the makings of the stuff of which resources consist; resource management applies what is found; and interpretation shapes and conveys the findings of both to kindle enlightenment for visitors to know the value of these special places in the National Park System. The articles of this issue will examine the essentials of this dynamic relationship.

- Interpreting research may be the most important task of interpreters. In this role we are helping the public understand the importance of research based management of their parks. Doing this effectively is critically needed.
- Selecting the correct research to meet your needs and using this information effectively in interpretation is worthy of careful thought.
- Interpreters bear the responsibility of conveying the most elemental meaning of national parks and the perpetuation of the national park idea. If we do not have a meaningful conservation ethic emanating from national parks, we may be failing in our most valuable role.
- Interpreters must confront and deal with research that is critical of our activities. The importance of continuing healthy amounts of research encouraged by educational institutions and professional organizations is vital.
- Without research interpretation would not be enriched and insightful. Research on interpretation is necessary for understanding its function for park visitors. Interpreters must support research.
- It is the responsibility of Interpretation to seek a relationship with Research, use its products, and continue to inspire visitors in the process.
- The Visitor Services Project is a valuable tool for interpretation. With accurate knowledge of park visitors and their activities in a park; interpreters will design more effective programs and services.
- Interpreters are challenged to know the changing composition of park visitors. Designing the most effective message to instill behavioral attitudes in park visitors adds a new dimension for interpreters.
- It is time to reexamine the makings of our interpretive products. We must question if we have forgotten the way to synthesize art and substance in presentation. Without a revitalization of substantive interpretation we risk increasingly shallow and mediocre interpretation.

Regional Information Survey

Alaska

The Alaska Region has published a "Comprehensive Resource Proposal," an appeal to fund needed scientific research for national parks and preserves in Alaska. Data base information is required to understand the complex and fragile ecosystems in Alaska. Managers require accurate and sustained scientific funding to make sound resource protection decisions over a period of years.

Interpretation has a significant role in this proposed effort through knowledgeable communication. Interpreters with education in natural and social sciences and keen communication skills and experiences are the most capable individuals to convey scientific findings to the visiting public and local communities. An inter-disciplinary effort is required between science, resource management, and interpretation to achieve the maximum benefits from this proposal. The time to initiate this effort was yesterday, but now is imperative.

Pacific Northwest

Regional Office of Interpretation and Visitor Services said "so long" to David A Pugh, its Chief of two years. New Congressional set-asides: Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument, and City of Rocks National Historic Site are under his supervision. Glenn L Hinsdale is Acting Chief until the vacancy is filled. Scott Shane, Program Management Trainee from Colonial, has been busy designing new exhibits for the PNRO foyer and travel throughout the Region's park areas. The exhibits are intended to share information about each division's function in the Regional Office, and display the significance of the resources in the parks of the Pacific Northwest Region. The Washington State Department of Transportation, Ferry System, and the National Park Service have a cooperative agreement for the Washington State Centennial (1889-1989). The Division is putting together a series of mounted exhibits depicting maritime activities, NPS area locations, and resources that will be installed on the State fleet of ferries.

Western

The greatest threat to wild plants and animals on this planet is loss of habitat. Not far behind are the losses caused by the international trade in plants, animals, and their products. In March, 1988, Regional Chief of Interpretation Dick Cunningham wrote a paper entitled "Some Interpretive Thoughts and Information on the International Trade in Plants and Animals." Since then he has been speaking on this subject at the training centers, in parks, and at seminars. Dick has been designated as an official liaison with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. USFWS has been transferring all types of confiscated wildlife products to Dick. These products can be used for a visitor center exhibit or for a great "show-and-tell" type of interpretive program. Remember that Black bear parts, reptiles and amphibians, cacti, ginseng, orchards, etc., that are collected/poached in the national parks are all part of this international trade. For a copy of Cunningham's paper or for acquiring wildlife products (elephant ivory, oriental medicines, sea turtle and coral jewelry, etc) for your park's interpretive use, call him at (415)556-3184.

Rocky Mountain

Statements for Interpretation are about as popular with some park Chief Interpreters as the Annual Call for the Freeman Tilden Award is with Regional Chiefs and just as important, too. Collectively, SFIs represent a digest of regional and national trends in activity participation, costs, and impacts upon parks. In 1985, Rocky Mountain Region published such a digest displaying stats and analyses for SFIs from '81-'84. The second report is now available on request for '85-'88. Tidbits: "talks" are easily the most economical personal service we provide; "roving" remains very expensive! Volume of activity hours for all interpretive personal services is inversely related to varying levels of total park visitation. Any guesses why? Call us.

Midwest

Ever get the feeling that, as you are running a long race, someone keeps moving the finish line? Sometimes it seems we are doing more than ever before, but never catching up. Joint seasonal workshops were conducted at LIHO and APIS for a record 65 participants. Isle Royale and other parks also presented training. Skills IIIB will be at JNEM in September. NAI's National Annual Workshop and our Regional Interpreters' Workshop will be merged in Minnesota in November. The Biological Diversity Curriculum for 4-6th graders, a strong action plan to complement the "Interpreting Biological Diversity Handbook," will be printed in August. New agreements with private corporations will fund AV programs in over 9 parks Servicewide. There is a 1-900 park information service in the works, and so much more. Hope to see everyone at the NAI Workshop.

Southwest

As groundwork for an effective Quincentennial Program, the Southwest Region is working behind the scenes to see some of the classic, out-of-print publications back in print. Examples include Herbert E. Bolton's *The Spanish Borderlands*, Carl Sauer's *The Early Spanish Main*, and The Dominguez-Escalante Journal. If you know of some gem that ought to be back in print, let Glen Kaye know (FTS 476-1838. COMM 505-988-6838). Dialogues are underway with many university presses, and the Service plans for Quincentennial development are a most attractive inducement to them. Seeing many of these works available again will help make our Quincentennial efforts all they can be.

Service Center Report

North Atlantic

Two key workshops occupied the training calendar in North Atlantic Region this spring. One was the "Joint Skills Teams" meeting held on March 30. The other was "Interpretation in Urban Areas" held in Lowell, MA, April 4-6.

Interpretive, resource management, maintenance and administrative personnel met in their annual review of training and projects to analyze the status of team efforts and organize programs for the coming year. A joint recruitment effort, consolidated instructor training, and a skills bank of instructors available for concessioner training were some of this year's positive meeting results.

The urban areas workshop emphasized the practical, particularly in techniques for creating programs at urban sites. Sponsored by this Region and several non-NPS organizations, over 115 participants dealt with topics ranging from the needs of urban audiences and the city as environment to heritage interpretation, partnerships, and urban education programs.

Southeast

In cooperation with officials of the US Virgin Islands school system, the National Park Service is developing an environmental education program to enhance understanding/appreciation of the Caribbean resources and their importance to the citizenry of the area. In support of Secretary Lujan's stewardship agenda and the *Interpretive Challenge*, the Southeast Region is developing a plan to learn from existing and expand educational/outreach and junior ranger efforts to help ensure citizen understanding/appreciation of public resources and support for policies aimed at resource protection and preservation. In addition, the Southeast Region is working with several entities to develop a travelling exhibit of some of the National Park Art Collection as a basis for opening an educational dialogue on the importance of values and resources extant in the National Park System.

Mid-Atlantic

Children are the focus of many activities at Colonial NHP this summer: a new Junior Ranger Program for children 6-12, who experience the site and earn a distinctive Colonial patch and Junior Ranger Certification; the "Young Settlers" program specializing in "hands-on" activities; the third annual "Children's Morning," scheduled for July 28, allowing participants to compete in Colonial games, a self-guided scavenger hunt ("Trashy Treasures"), native American pottery making demonstrations, storytelling, and a special appearance by Smokey the Bear.

The John Huston film, "Independence," shown at Independence NHP's Visitor Center, is now available for sale in video (1/2" VHS, 28 minutes, color, \$24.95 + shipping). Eli Wallach, Anne Jackson, Ken Howard star. Call Eastern National Park and Monument Association at (215) 597-3531 to order.

National Capitol

Summer visitors to Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens will enjoy the services of an interpreter hired with funds from the Potomac Heritage Award. The Award was established by the National Capital Region in 1988 to recognize innovative and effective interpretive programs. First prize was \$4200, the cost of a summer seasonal. The first winner was Kenilworth, National Capital Parks-East.

Kenilworth submitted an environmental education program for elementary school students--a guided walk led by Mother Nature. This program showed the value of costumed interpretation (Mother looked quite a bit like Park Ranger Carol Borneman), and how resource management messages can be given in an entertaining and effective manner.

Denver

Recently Bart Young, an interpretive planner on the western team visited Katmai NM as a member of a planning team that will develop a DCP for the Brooks Camp area of the park. A few selected (and therefore out of context) quotes from Bart's report illustrate the value of having an Interpretive Planner as an integral part of planning teams. "The visitor centeris in an extremely out-of-way location and is visited by less than 1% of the day use visitors and the percentage is probably not that much higher for extended stay visitors." "A ranger is stationed at the bear viewing platform for approximately 7 hours a day during the peak season; however most of the rangers time is spent managing hordes of people and gaggles of bears on and near the overcrowded platform adjacent to the falls. The ranger does not have the time or the appropriate situation to provide an effective interpretive presentation. And you think you have difficult working conditions!"

Harpers Ferry

HFC's Historic Furnishings Division has undertaken an innovative approach to meet the needs of a "fast-track" development project at Harpers Ferry NHP. Ten historic buildings are slated for restoration in the next few years, a task which would tax their capacity.

Utilizing a cooperative agreement with the University of Maryland, a graduate student has been contracted to conduct historical research. The Research Assistant is gathering data on the historical occupancy of the structures and their contents. Rather than producing a detailed written report, a presentation to the park and project architects will be made. A detailed listing of recommendations and research notes will also be provided.

This approach will get the information to those who need it in less than half the normal time.

Roy Graybill
VIP Program Manager
202/523-5270

The completely new, full color Volunteers in Parks brochure is completed and has been distributed to the regional offices. It was produced by Harpers Ferry Center and is a terrific improvement over the old brochure. By now your park should have a supply. Check with your regional VIP Coordinator if you haven't seen it. The brochure is also available unfolded, for use as a poster.

You will note that the brochure no longer contains an application form. From now on, the Service will use USDA/USDI Optional Form 301 (Volunteer Application for Natural Resources Agencies) as the standard VIP application form. You can get an initial supply of that form from your regional VIP Coordinator also. You are also free to use your own park specific application form instead, if you wish.

Sandy Weber
Cultural Resources Interpretive Specialist
202/523-0531

We have been informally looking at the status of cultural resources interpretation in the last few months, trying to determine where our efforts should be concentrated, and to identify themes and resource types that we have generally overlooked in our interpretive programs. Two of the "missing stories" which have been identified are slavery, and the culture and history of Native Americans. Resource types that have also not received much attention, largely because they have only recently been considered significant resources, include CCC structures, abandoned mines, and cultural landscapes.

We will be working with the various Regional Offices, parks and outside experts to develop training courses, interpretive manuals, videos, etc., designed to help field interpreters incorporate these themes and resources into appropriate interpretive programs. We have already had several meetings with representatives of "Historically Black Colleges and Universities" to discuss the interpretation of slavery, and have requested that last year's highly successful training course on "Interpreting Native American Cultures" be repeated.

If you have additional themes or resource types that you feel are receiving less than their fair share of interpretation, or want to participate in work groups or training courses on these subjects, please feel free to call our office with your suggestions.

Dale Ditmanson
Stephen T Mather Employee Development Center
304/535-6371

Opportunities abound for interpretive training in FY90. Although the entire 1990 schedule is not formalized, there are several courses on tap for the first quarter. The fiscal year starts off with "Maintenance Training for Interpretive Media," October 16-20. A new course to provide training for care and maintenance of audio-visual equipment, historic furnishings and exhibits. Other courses include: "Curatorial Methods," October 23 - November 3; "Interpretive Planning," November 28 - December 7; and "Interpretive Program Management," December 11-20. In addition don't forget NAI's National Interpreters Workshop in St Paul, MN, November 5-10.

Plans are progressing for an Interpretive Skills Instructor's Workshop early in CY90. This will be an opportunity for both new and veteran Skills Team members. New Offerings for FY90 may include "Interpreting the Columbus Quincentennial" and "Interpreting Military Resources."