



Trends in Interpretation

Trends

APRIL / MAY / JUNE 1974



A PUBLICATION OF THE PARK PRACTICE PROGRAM

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON STATE PARKS

Lemuel A. Garrison, *President*
John S. Blair, *Executive Secretary*

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Rogers C. B. Morton, *Secretary*
Ronald H. Walker, *Director*
Jean C. Henderer, *Ch., Div. of Fed., State & Priv. Liaison*

NATIONAL RECREATION AND PARK ASSOCIATION

Charles Fraser, *Chrm., Board of Trustees*
Dwight F. Rettie, *Executive Director*
Mildred Zimmerman, *Circulation Manager*

EDITORIAL BOARD

A. Heaton Underhill Wash., D.C.
Assistant Director, BOR
LeRoy Bond Wash., D.C.
U.S. Forest Service, Dept. of Agriculture
Stanton Ernst Silver Spring, Md.
Md.-Nat. Capital Park & Planning Commission
Jean C. Henderer Wash., D.C.
Patricia Conner Wash., D.C.

STAFF

Patricia Conner, *Managing Editor*
Glenn Snyder, *Art Editor*

District Lithograph Company, Wash., D.C.

Not printed or distributed at Government expense.

The views and opinions expressed in TRENDS are those of the authors and not necessarily those of this publication, the Park Practice Program, its sponsoring and cooperating organizations, agencies or the officers thereof.

Articles concerned with studies, concepts, philosophies and projections related to the many aspects of parks and recreation are invited. Illustrative graphic materials, where necessary or desirable, and a brief biographical sketch of the author should accompany text intended for publication. Send all material intended for publication to:

Editor, TRENDS, Div. of Federal, State and Private Liaison, NPS, Washington, D.C. 20240.

The Park Practice Program, which publishes TRENDS, also publishes DESIGN, GUIDELINE and GRIST. Membership in the Program is open to all persons or organizations concerned with every type of recreation or park planning, development and operation. Application for membership should be made to: The Park Practice Program, National Conference on State Parks, 1601 N. Kent St., Arlington, Va. 22209.

Initial membership fee, \$80, provides a library of the above listed publications with binders and indices, and all issues of such published items for the remainder of the calendar year. Annual renewal fee thereafter, \$20. TRENDS subscriptions: \$10, initial, \$8.00 renewal.

In this issue . . .

Principles of Interpretation by Freeman Tilden 1

Author of the classic interpretation text, *Interpreting Our Heritage*. Freeman Tilden is one of the nation's leading authorities on the subject.

Living with the Land by William C. Beckner..... 3

William C. Beckner is currently a builder of log cabins and a student of stonemasonry in the Blowing Rock, North Carolina area.

The story included in this issue of TRENDS is excerpted from his Master's Thesis and is based on information gathered while he served as a seasonal interpreter naturalist at Blue Ridge Parkway in 1973.

The Challenge of Professional Interpretation

by Nelson T. Bernard, Jr. 9

Nelson Bernard is President of the Association of Interpretive Naturalists, an international organization based in Derwood, Md.

He is in charge of the U.S. Forest Service Visitor Information Services (Interpretation) program in the Southwest. A graduate forester, Mr. Bernard has been with the U.S. Forest Service for 26 years.

Interpretation for Recreation by Rex E. Derr..... 13

Rex E. Derr is the Park Naturalist for the National Capital Parks-East and has worked extensively in the national parks system.

He has a B.S. in Park Administration from Penn State University and an M.S. in Recreation Resource Development from Texas A & M University.

Interpreting Parks for Kids--Making it Real

by Gary Machlis and Donald R. Field..... 19

Gary E. Machlis is a Graduate Research Assistant in the Sociology Studies Program, Pacific Northwest Region, National Park Service. The Program is located in the College of Forest Resources, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington. The Sociology Studies Program has been directed to carry out a series of research investigations designed to assess human behavior in areas managed by the National Park Service.

Dr. Donald Field is Research Sociologist, Pacific Northwest Region, National Park Service and Associate Professor, College of Forest Resources, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.

The Interpretive Encounter: Breaking the Barriers

by Steve Van Matre..... 26

Steve Van Matre is a consultant to the Institute for Environmental Awareness at George Williams College, William's Bay, Wisconsin.

Author of "Acclimitization" and "Acclimatizing," pamphlets available from the American Camping Association, Mr. Van Matre has given extensive presentations on his work to park interpreters.

Photos by the National Park Service

TRENDS IN INTERPRETATION

An Introduction



PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETATION

by Freeman Tilden

- Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
 - Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
 - Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
 - The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
 - Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
 - Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.
-



LIVING WITH THE LAND

by William C. Beckner

This is a prospectus designed as an aid to the seasonal interpreter to help him meet the interpretive goals and objectives of the Blue Ridge Parkway. Though the seasonal is responsible for both visitor information and interpretation, the prospectus is primarily concerned with materials, methods, and techniques of interpretation.

According to *Administrative Policies for Recreation Areas of the National Park System*, "the objectives of the information and interpretive program are to inform visitors of recreational opportunities available, provide them a better understanding of, and appreciation for, the natural environment and assist them in their quest for a quality outdoor recreational experience." (USDI:NPS, 1968: 26)

The Parkway has further defined these objectives, giving more specific attention to interpretation. The following Parkway management objectives have the greatest influence on the interpretive program: (Liles, 1970:7-8)

1. Resource Management Objectives

Preserve and use Parkway resources in accordance with the land classification plan. Identify and preserve the pioneer culture, pastoral landscapes, and historic and natural resources. Eliminate non-conforming uses and prevent encroachments that adversely affect aesthetic values and reduce visitor enjoyment and inspiration.

2. Visitor-Use Objectives

Provide adequate visitor information facilities to help the public fully utilize the recreational opportunities of the Parkway and the region.

Enhance visitor use and enjoyment through continued and broadened opportunities for contact with and interpretation of the natural, historical, cultural, and recreational resources of the Southern Highlands through which the Parkway passes.

Preserve the unique and interesting pioneer culture through interpretive exhibits and signs, and through preservation of buildings and artifacts.

Based upon the objectives established by the National Park Service, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the resource inventory of the parks, the objectives of the interpretive prospectus are to:

1. Reduce the new seasonal's training time by introducing them to the basic principles and concepts of interpretation and the resources of the area prior to their reporting date.
2. Aid in initial program development through abstracts of the interpretive inventory and designation of possible sources and references.
3. Increase the effectiveness and enjoyment of the program for the visitor by focusing interpretive resources through theme development.
4. Increase the provocation of visitor interest by suggesting methods and techniques which can increase the opportunity for interaction between the visitor and the park environment.
5. Provide a base for future development of a detailed interpretive plan.



DEFINITION OF TERMS

An interpretive prospectus is not a detailed plan which gives precise direction. It is a conceptual plan which provides parameters for guidance yet retains flexibility to accommodate the diverse interests and abilities of the seasonal interpreter.

Use of the term, "interpretive program," will refer to the actual face-to-face, scheduled activities and not to visitor contacts which are informational in content.

The resource inventory is the identification of all resources without determination of their propensity as interpretive material. The interpretive inventory includes those resources lending themselves best to interpretation.

Natural resources are the sum total of resources which would exist in the area if man were not present. Significant events and eras are historic resources which have influenced the development of the mountain culture. Cultural resources concern the attitudes, processes, skills, and habits found in everyday life which were influenced by the historic and natural resources or were based on ancestral teachings and values. Recreation resources are those opportunities and facilities available to the visitor.

INTERPRETATION

If the objective were simply to label interpretation, it could be called an educational method because it includes elements of education and information. But interpretation also transcends the educational structure because it is personal, not authoritarian. The leisure setting in which it is found is usually voluntary. Interpretation, therefore, must entice and provoke interest rather than demand it.

Freeman Tilden defines interpretation as, "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information." (Tilden, 1957:8)

A different way to view interpretation may be to contrast it with formal education. Education is oriented to the study of specifics. Each total concept is broken down into smaller and smaller parts for more specialized study. With more formal education, the student seems to get farther from the total concept and may let his perspective narrow until the total concept is no longer important. Interpretation is a reverse of this process. It takes a fragment of a concept and relates that to the total concept and makes this relationship relevant to the visitor. In short, education is a diffusion process whereas interpretation is a focusing and synthesizing process. Although there are many inadequacies in Tilden's six principles, as set forth in the introduction of the issue of *TRENDS*, they continue to offer the best overall guidance available. However, some mention should be made concerning Principle Four. For many years, interpreters have assumed that this principle strictly forbade any instruction at all. With the realization that visitor participation adds an entirely new dimension to the concept of provocation, instruction has become an important part of the interpretive program.

AN EXAMPLE

Assume that two leaders have taken groups on a hike. One is oriented toward education and the other toward interpretation. The educator, leading the first group, stops to identify a *Betula Lutea* (Yellow Birch). He makes note of the paper-thin bark of a yellowish color and points out that the leaves are narrow toward the base and a duller green on top. The leaves have downy veins underneath and the twigs have a slight wintergreen aroma. (Fernald, 1950:533) Satisfied that the students can identify the tree, he moves on to the *Eupatorium Rugosum* (White Snakeroot). He mentions that the plant is poisonous and grows from one to four feet high. The leaves are ovate and sharply toothed and the plant has a rhizome root system. (Fernald, 1950:1369) Turning to the nearby *Verbascum Thapsus* (Common Mullein) he identifies this easily by the rosette of

large, woolly leaves and the tall, stout stem (Fernald, 1950:1264). As he moves along the trail in this manner he can be satisfied that he is serving a valuable educational purpose. Students interested in further study of botany need to know how to identify species and must learn their latin names.

But what of those students who have developed no interest in the study of plants? Will they be driven even farther away from botany by such specialized study?

The interpreter is now taking the same path and telling the story of pioneer life through objects along the trail. As he starts his walk, he may make stops to let the hikers listen to the rushing water and the singing birds. As they pass some blackberry bushes, he may invite them to try some of the berries, telling them that they may take fruit from the park but must leave the other resources for the enjoyment of those who follow. As he approaches the Yellow Birch, he explains that for demonstration purposes he will take a small twig from the tree. Peeling the bark back so the wintergreen aroma can be smelled, he tells the hikers that a similar twig was used as a toothbrush by the mountain people because of the flavor and the soft bristle that is formed when the twig is split. Moving on along the trail, he notes the temperature difference between the shaded and the sunny areas. By this time he has attempted to make the visitors aware of how their senses can help them observe and enjoy their surroundings.

Coming to the White Snakeroot, the interpreter may stop and note that it is in the shade of the Laurel bushes and out of the sun entirely. This is important because the plant is deadly poisonous and caused a disease in people called "milk-sick." In the early days, the people let their cattle roam through the woods for food. The cattle would often eat this plant in the late summer when most of the other plants had dried out. The result was a disease called the "trembles" which was named for the symptoms of the disease. The problem was that it took several days for the cow to get sick and the poison was transmitted through the milk before the symptoms showed in the cow. Many people died of this disease including Abraham Lincoln's mother.

Since the people did not know what caused the disease they advanced the theory that since the cow got the disease from feeding in shaded areas the shade must cause the air to turn poisonous and infect the plants (Thomas, 1942:174). The result was that people began the practice of clearing areas for pastureland. It was not until 1940 that a botanist studying the plant found that it contained a poison called tremenal which was the cause of the sickness.

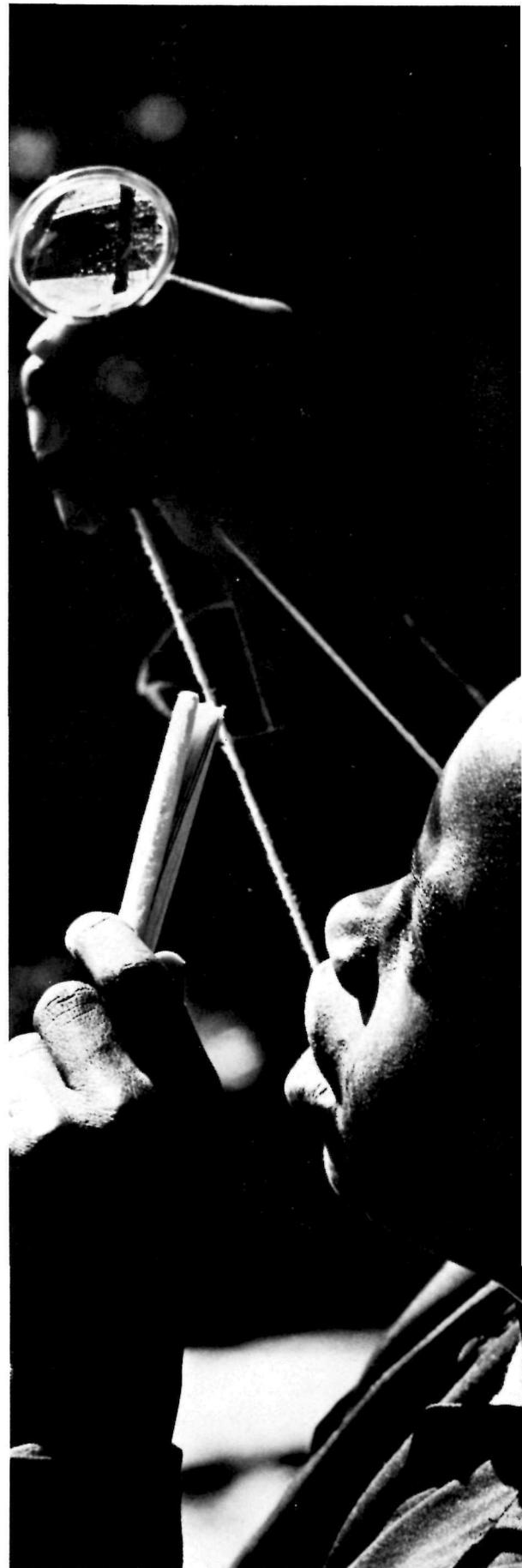
Turning to the Common Mullein, the interpreter describes it as having medicinal values based on the Doctrine of Signatures. This doctrine was a superstition that a plant that resembled a part of the human body was good for curing ailments in that part of the body. (Coon, 1963:26) The large, woolly-looking leaves were thought to be good for curing lung ailments and were smoked to clear up congestion. There is no evidence that this actually helped the sick person. (Coon, 1963:219)

As the interpreter moves along the trail telling his story, he is simply trying to provoke the hikers into becoming interested in some of the things he is telling them. Perhaps one of them has a latent interest in botany and has now gained the perspective to make the study of latin names and identification worthwhile. Or, perhaps, the hikers will begin to see that the world around them is indeed interesting and deserves a closer look.

INTERPRETIVE THEME DEVELOPMENT

If one principle of interpretation is to present a whole rather than a part, then some process is needed to focus these parts into that whole. This process is called theme development.

Theme development involves the selection of one central theme that tells the story of the whole area and can easily be related to the visitors' private lives. When the central theme has been determined, sub-themes should be chosen that adequately group the available resources and focus them toward the central



theme. In this manner, specific subjects can be used to tell the whole story of the area. The subjects are chosen on the basis of their relationship to both the central theme and other sub-themes. Determination of the themes is based on the objectives of the Parkway and the resource inventory.

CENTRAL THEME

Man and land relationship is a central theme that adequately depicts the total story of Cone and Price Parks. This is not because of these two men and their influence on the park areas but because of the significant influence the land has had on the people who have lived here and the impact the people have had on the land.

The physical barriers of the mountains induced the people to seek this land to gain freedom and to avoid oppression. But the resultant isolation has exacted a toll that has permeated their entire history and culture. While the rest of the country advanced, the mountain people were vigorously involved in a struggle for existence. As a result, they made their debut to the rest of the country as anachronisms—people caught in a cultural lag with 18th century language, attitudes, and customs in a 20th century world.

The effects of the cultural shock have worn off and now the people who had been so dependent upon the land for their existence find that the land is dependent upon them for its survival. Man has the capability of totally destroying the land through careless and improper development. The people of the mountains are the only ones who can save it by proper planning and regulation. Will they remember the generosity or the frugality of the land?

Man's dependence on the land and the land's dependence on man are relationships that quietly confront Americans in their everyday decisions. The combined relationships form a story that is worthy of being told to the visitor and can be vividly demonstrated with the resources of the parks.

SUB-THEMES

The sub-themes must encompass an area general enough to cover several subjects yet retain the necessary focus upon the central theme. The sub-themes of natural resources, historical resources, and cultural resources fit these criteria.

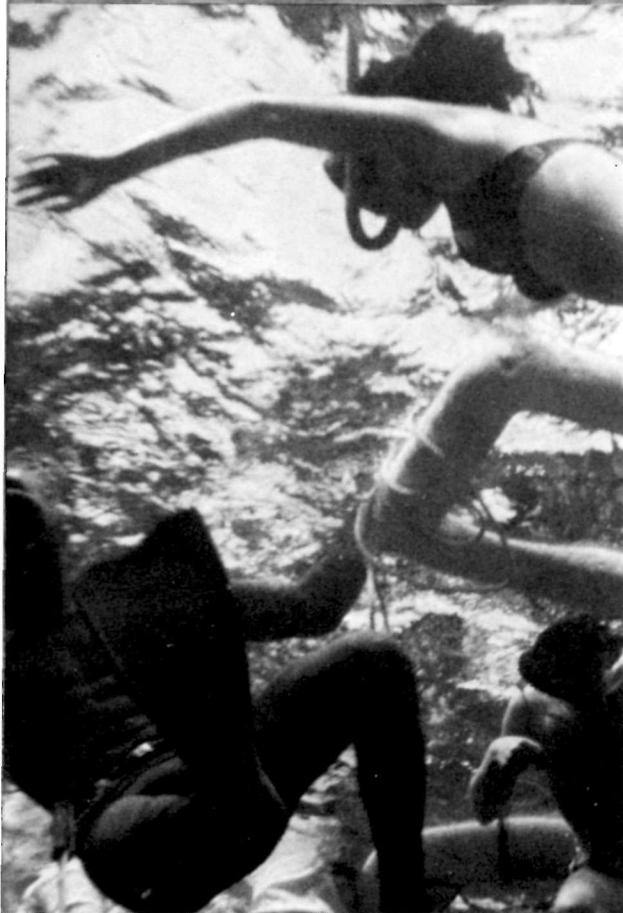
The natural resource sub-theme represents the land. It will be the dominant sub-theme for two reasons. First, it is an independent resource. Subjects from this area can be related directly to man without requiring mention of the mountain culture. Secondly, the National Park Service is a land-managing agency. As such, it is important to emphasize environmental interpretation, when possible, to help the visitor formulate a land ethic. For example; the interpreter could give a talk on the similarities between animals found in the parks and man in general. This could help the visitor to appreciate our wildlife more but would not dwell on the mountain culture.

There is also ample opportunity to show the relationship between man and land using the natural sub-theme in conjunction with other sub-themes. For example, a talk on trees could include aspects of natural, cultural, and historical resources.

The cultural and historical sub-themes are more dependent upon the natural sub-theme. This is a reflection of the long dependence the people have had on the land and the relatively short period of time the land has been dependent upon the people.

The cultural resource sub-theme can be used to show how the culture of the mountains was affected by the land. The subject of "moonshine" is a cultural resource that can tell the complete story of the mountains because the art of distilling was brought from the old country by the original settlers and still takes place today.

Many historical events have had an effect on the man-land relationship in the mountains. Sometimes an external event like the closing of the frontier has had important effects on the life of the people and the land. Following this event, many land speculators became quite interested in the mineral and timber resources of the mountain areas.



There are numerous subject areas within each of the sub-themes that can be suitably focused toward the man-land relationship. Careful selection of subjects and diligent background research can be the vehicles on which the visitor may embark on a trip that will make his vacation the beginning of a lifetime interest.

An understanding of the principles of interpretation and careful selection of interpretive subjects are very important to a successful interpretive program. The program base is the interpretive walk and evening talk format, which should be perfected first. But, there is no need to limit the program to this format. Flexibility should be retained so that new and creative interpretive methods can be incorporated into the program.

METHODS AND SUGGESTIONS

To aid in developing the story for a walk or talk, there are two minor principles that could be helpful. First, never simply identify an object. If nothing of interest is known about a flower, for example, do not mention it in the program. Of course, if a visitor asks for the name, it can then be identified. Secondly, do not interpret everything. Most subjects are much more involved than the interpreter can hope to cover on a walk or talk. Pick good examples of the categories and let that suffice.

Instruction and participation are also important aspects of the interpretive program. It is not enough to provoke interest in a visitor when that interest may be starved for lack of instruction and knowledge. Living history demonstrations have in the past relegated the visitor to the role of observer by not allowing him to participate. How quickly could interest be aroused if the visitor was allowed to take even the simplest part in a living history demonstration or activity?

If a program provokes a great deal of visitor interest, it may be worthwhile to have an activity session to let the visitor participate. For example, if an evening talk is about weaving, the next day's walk could concern the various plant and vegetable dyes that were used or arrangements could be made for the visitors to try weaving at the craft center.

Photography walks, survival or conservation techniques, and many other types of activities could be incorporated into the interpretive program that would possibly provide the needed vehicle to travel from provocation to participation. Programs other than walks or talks which may be attempted could be mini-festivals, which may involve arts and crafts, music, living history demonstrations, or dramatic programs. The possibilities for the types of programs are as numerous as the subjects that can be interpreted.

It may be more valuable to move the location of certain programs to improve their visibility to the visitor. The picnic grounds might be a good place to provide some programs as this would increase the contact with the day-use visitors.

SUMMARY

Interpretation may be a new experience for the seasonal but it is an important part of many visitors' vacations. These visitors' attitudes toward the parks and the Park Service will depend to a large extent on the programs that are provided.

The hearthfire of the mountain cabin was never allowed to die. Rekindling the fire was difficult and the people felt a house without a hearthfire was not a home. Many basic materials went into making the log cabin and all were important. The same is true of this prospectus and interpretation in general. Each part is important if the interpreter is to kindle the visitors' interest.

The foundation is the first step in building a log cabin. Cabins were often supported by a series of pillars, but these were subject to weaknesses not found in cabins built on a solid foundation. Likewise, program weaknesses can develop from an incomplete understanding of the foundation principles and concepts of interpretation.



The sills were made from a sturdy, long-lasting wood and fit directly on the foundation. They were the base that supported the floor and walls. The interpretive inventory consists of the four sills of natural, historical, cultural, and recreation resources. These provide the base for adding "subject" logs to build the "informational" walls.

The inventory is the program foundation for the seasonal interpreter. The information is general and relationships are not always shown, but programs can be developed by synthesizing the various abstracts of information. However, more information is needed to properly develop programs. It would be foolish to build a foundation, lay the sills, add the roof and call it a log cabin. The same is true for the interpretive effort; "informational" walls are necessary for the interpretive home.

The "subject" logs have been previously hewn by men in specialized areas. The references in each appendix can aid the seasonal in finding these logs. Each added log must be carefully notched so it supports the abutting logs. Just as it is impossible to build a log cabin by erecting one wall at a time, the resources of the parks are best represented when viewed in relation to each other.

When the walls have reached sufficient height the roof is added. Functionally, the roof protects the inhabitants from the elements. It prevents things from entering the home that are better left outside.

The interpretive themes are the roof of the interpretive effort. They focus all of the resources; eliminating the extraneous elements that distract from the story and prevent the house from serving its function.

The basic structure has now been completed, but it still lacks some of the essentials of a home. These essentials must be provided by the interpreter. His interests will act as the chinking that bonds the seemingly unrelated "subject" logs. His knowledge can serve as the floor that rests on the "resource" sills and supports the "informational" walls. If strong, this flooring will entice visitors to explore the interpretive home. The interpreter's experience can build the chimney that draws well and keeps the kindled interest glowing. His techniques are the furnishings found in the home for they add the atmosphere to the experience.

But what of the fire that makes the interpretive house a home? Enthusiasm is the flint that can kindle the flame of visitor interest. By building a solid, draft-free house and a chimney that draws well, that flame may grow into a fire that will fan the visitor's desire to build a home of his own—not an interpretive home but a home of understanding and awareness where man and land live in harmony.

REFERENCES CITED

- Blue Ridge Parkway. "Seasonal Interpreters Handbook." 1970.
- Coon, Nelson. *Using Plants For Healing*. Great Neck, New York: Hearthsides Press, Inc. 1963.
- Fernald, Merritt L. *Gray's Manual of Botany*. 8th Edition. Boston: American Book Co. 1950.
- Liles, Granville B. "Management Objectives—Blue Ridge Parkway." 1970.
- Thomas, Jean. *Blue Ridge Country*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pierce. 1942.
- Tilden, Freeman. *Interpreting Our Heritage*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 1957.
- U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. *Administrative Policies—For Recreation Areas of the National Park System*. Washington: Government Printing Office. 1968.

GENERAL REFERENCES

- Brown, William E. *Islands of Hope*. Washington: National Recreation and Park Association. 1971.
- Huth, Hans. *Nature and the American*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. 1957.
- Lord, William G. *The Blue Ridge Parkway Guide*. Sec. A-D. Ashville, North Carolina: Stephens Press, Inc. 1965.
- Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. New Haven: The Yale University Press. 1973.
- Shepard, Paul. *Man in the Landscape*. New York: Ballantine Books Inc. 1967.
- All photographs are courtesy of the Blue Ridge Parkway of the National Park Service.

THE CHALLENGE OF PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETATION

by Nelson T. Bernard, Jr.

What is professionalism? No question can be as important to the future of interpretation and the beneficial role of professional interpreters in the society of our time. The same level of continuing professional improvement is needed in the field of interpretation as in many other professions. I agree, it is tempting to sit back after we receive our college degree and think that we have all the knowledge and training needed to forever function satisfactorily as interpreters. We have all seen such interpreters in our time. These persons went to a school that taught interpretation. They graduated. The end of academia and of their need to study, so they thought. Usually it is these interpreters who turn sour as they find other interpreters—sometimes younger interpreters—being promoted over them or going to bigger and better opportunities that just seemed to open up for them.

The interpreter who continually complains or talks about his boss or agency, or worse, downgrades the profession of interpretation, is usually the one who does just enough to get by.

All professions have this type of individual. Although these individuals puzzle and, and at times, depress me, I have not lost my enthusiasm for the profession.

There is a formula for getting ahead in the field of interpretation—and there is always room at the top for those few willing to prepare themselves and extend that extra effort it takes to get there. The formula is thorough preparation and continuing professional improvement.

The desire for *continuing professional improvement* is why such organizations as the Association of Interpretive Naturalists have been formed. The workshops conducted by these organizations help provide the needed continuing professional improvement and is probably their most valuable service to the individual member.

I am a strong believer that self-improvement or continuing education is the responsibility of the individual. Opportunities abound for increasing social awareness, improving performance, communicative skills, and organizational talents. The key is an open mind and continuous self-education.

Back to my opening question—what is professionalism; what makes an interpreter truly a professional interpreter?

As I stated earlier, a professional education alone does not make a professional. Neither does just putting in tenure in your chosen profession, even though you may be obtaining invaluable experience. Closely following your profession's code of ethics, even as important as this is does not constitute professionalism. There are other ingredients, or actions, that are just as important in making up "professionalism" but they are extremely hard to define. In my estimation these others, when combined with education, experience, and ethical conduct, make up the total of a true professional in any line of work.

I believe one of the most important of the "other items" is INTEGRITY; integrity to one's self and to the profession. He will give his honest professional opinion although it may be unpopular with his employer or the public. He admits it when he does not have answers to questions asked. There are three little words that I insist that any interpreter working for me must add to his vocabulary. These are "*I don't know.*" Wonderful words for establishing rapport with your audience—as long as they are not over used.

As part of integrity, the truly professional person will never tend to have an expertise on subjects outside of his profession or fields of his professional knowledge.

When a person is directed by his employer to perform actions which he knows to be technically wrong, he should so inform the employer of this fact. If the person issuing the original instructions decides to proceed, the professional person must face the alternatives of accomplishing the task to the best of his ability or leaving the employment of the organization.



Every profession requires integrity and in the long run the professional person is rewarded, despite some short-term adverse effects. There is no substitute for integrity.

Another mark of the professional is DEDICATION. This is the application of oneself to a job and seeing it through to a successful completion. In fact, the very essence of professionalism is perseverance and thoroughness. In other words, doing what it takes to produce a thorough, complete job of extra effort, extra time, extra digging for facts, checking and rechecking on each specific assignment. Unplanned obstacles often pop up and must be tackled and overcome. Sometimes, extra hours without pay must be involved to complete the job on time.

Frustrating and disheartening? Yes, at times, but it is all part of the dedication required in true professionalism. The professional person must be psyched up mentally so that he is prepared to commit his intellectual and physical being, his skills, enthusiasm, courage, and patience to each assignment. A dedication to self-improvement from a commitment to a state of knowledge in his field leads to updating his professional knowledge continuously throughout his career.

One word we all hear today is WORKMANSHIP. We often hear, or say ourselves, "The workmanship in this or that is not what it used to be." A professional is known by his product. Interpretive service is the product of the professional interpreter. If the interpretation produced by the interpreter becomes slipshod and questionable, the identity as a professional will become impaired. To avoid this, every young professional interpreter should set attainable goals and high standards for himself. To help attain these standards, the professional must develop self-discipline and work habits that will allow attainment of these standards at an acceptable level of output. It would be wrong for him to take on more work than can be accomplished without lowering his standards.

PATIENCE must be a professional criterion for an interpreter. Patience is essential since interpreters work with people. Most people do not have the in-depth understanding of nature, history, or the environment as does the interpreter. Some do not even possess some of the very basic nature concepts. The interpreter must not lose his cool when a "stupid" question is asked. Remember, there is no such thing as a stupid question and that man does not become stupid until he stops asking questions. The professional interpreter is blessed with a wealth of information that he should want to share with others. Ross Files, an interpreter for the U.S. Forest Service in Portland Oregon, coined a phrase



several years ago and it is on every piece of written information he puts out. I think it is applicable here. Ross Files lives by his statement of "SHARING IS THE KEYNOTE TO INTERPRETATION."

It can be seen that professionalism in interpretation is more than a college degree. It is a blend of professional education, experience, ethical conduct, workmanship, integrity, dedication, and patience. There are others, undoubtedly. However, unless the interpreter has these qualities in sufficient quantities, it is doubtful if he is a truly professional interpreter.

Therefore, I think it is vital for young people entering into the interpretive profession to realize these listed essentials and that they seek every opportunity for self-improvement.

I think the direction for the interpretive profession can only be positive—if we dare accept the challenge. Never before in recorded time have the masses been concerned about their environment to the extent they are today. They have the right to be concerned as well as the right to be provided with knowledge about their environment. Who is better qualified to help them in their quest for information than the professional interpreter? Do you accept this challenge? Do you dare to accept changes? Changes in the public' demands for information from "what" to "how" and "why"? Changes in methods and techniques in presenting the information? And last, but not least, changes in the information itself?

If the interpreters are ready and willing to dare accept these changes and the challenges facing them, professionalism in interpretation has come of age.

The interpreters must stop spending so much time selling themselves as professionals and, instead, act as professionals. They must cease peddling their degrees and turn to selling their knowledge. The professional must continue to develop to be able to move forward and accept the challenge.

The professional must care for the profession. If the attitude, "I am just an interpreter" prevails, with little esteem or regard for oneself or the profession, lower value will be placed upon the profession and it will not be able to dare to accept the challenge of moving forward.

John Muir, Freeman Tilden, William H. Carr were professional interpreters who dared to accept the challenge. Are you a professional interpreter? Do you dare to accept the challenge?



INTERPRETATION FOR RECREATION

by Rex E. Derr

Four truisms argue strongly the cause for interpretation in a recreation area. Attraction to the site precludes the need to sell the area via interpretive advertising. Mass visitation affords the managing agency an opportunity to convey interpretive messages to many individuals on a reoccurring basis. The comfort and familiarity experienced by the visitor on-site opens interpretive channels not normally feasible in strange, trying environments. Finally, the steppingstone phenomenon, or as Steven Van Matre (1972) so aptly puts it, the "Acclimatization" approach, takes precedence in an area where initial inspiration may be the key to effective interpretation. A closer look at these four concepts may clarify some questionable phrasing.

Interpretation, has for years, been the key to making areas of great individual and natural integrity, relevant to the masses. "Inspiration" and "understanding" have been often used terms resulting from gallant efforts by the knowledgeable to enlighten the not so fortunates. A more pragmatic rationale for interpretation calls on its necessity to help protect the gems of fragile natural handiworks from intentional vandalism. Whatever the justification, natural and historical areas have had to meet public satisfaction or face a potentially short lived existence. Interpretation has played the major role in developing the attraction to an area and sustaining interest in.

The drawback to this interpretive function has been an inability to direct subjects further into the basic processes of life. Thus Mount Rainier is known because of its sensational oneness among the lowlands of the Pacific Northwest. The Grand Canyon is known for its imensity and grandeur. Neither are renowned for their preservation of natural processes common to each other and typical of a visitor's home environment. Recreation areas provide their own inherent attraction in the form of recreational entertainment. This immediately relieves interpretation of the attraction and acceptance role and allows it to pass on to more important "housekeeping" chores.

Any agency dedicated to the wise use of natural resources on a national, state or local level would be expected to influence its audience in the most amenable situations. Such a situation would be dictated, in one way, by size of the audience. The more individuals an agency communicates with, assuming communication is effective, the greater the chances of achieving desired management objectives. Recreation areas usually provide the most densely occupied reserves that a public recreation agency administers. In many cases, recreation area users are repetitive in nature. This affords not only a large number of acquaintances, but a large number of reoccurring acquaintances. Interpretation to large numbers on a repetitive basis can serve the public agency as optimally as is possible.

Proximity to the origin of the visitor and heavy activity facilitation provide a comfortable, familiar play environment in national and state recreation areas. Visitors are often close to home and are in some cases in the company of their mobile homes. Safeguards for self and family are not a worry, thus relieving many persistant anxieties. For the activity-oriented visitor familiarity with the area breeds a lack of concern about the resources and disregard for their careful use. Such comfort opens channels for a relaxed learning environment while familiarity sets up challenging barriers for interpreters to overcome. Once effectively overcome by interpretive programming, the barriers will open impressive doorways into the hearts of constituents.

The more individuals an agency communicates with, the greater the chance of achieving desired management objectives.



Environmental education treatises more clearly state the desired product of interpretation than most interpreters. In the minds of some environmental education differs from interpretation. Others testify they are synonymous. To the author, environmental education is interpretation that has been progressively programmed into the formal curriculum of a school system. The end result of the effort is a problem solving format for community environmental action instilled in the individual. Interpretation, on the other hand, represents separate parts of the process as well as the whole if not permeating a school curriculum. Interpretation can be merely inspirational in nature, provocative, educational or any combination of the three. Certainly, in a recreation area, it would be difficult to achieve the results desired of environmental education because of time constraints.

It is important to rely on the "*steppingstone phenomenon*" of interpretation at a recreation area. In *Acclimatization*, Van Matre provides a vehicle to take children from a state of disinterest to one of minimal concern about their support system. The "*steppingstone phenomenon*" attempts to do the same, or take an individual from the state of minimal concern, to one of passive interest, or on to one of active interest and so on. By offering a wide variety of interpretive opportunities, the visitor can be contacted at his/her own level of relatedness and carried to the next step. The "*steppingstone phenomenon*" points out the fractional importance of interpretation and its immediacy to every visitor within a national or state recreation area.

MOVING AWAY FROM TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION

Even a hasty review of state interpretive efforts in water based recreation areas reveals traditional interpretive programs still dominating. Self-guiding interpretive trails, campfire programs, ranger led nature hikes and a few unvandalized interpretive signs are prevalent. National recreation areas appear to fall in the same category, although, as in some state parks systems, a few innovative interpreters are forging ahead with vigor. The National Park Service is placing renewed emphasis on interpretation throughout the System. In Director Walker's recent State of the Parks message he praised new programs in heavily visited national parks, living history programs in historical areas, and cultural interpretation in several metropolitan areas. Disappointingly though, not one mention was made of the potential and interest deserving of interpretation in national recreation areas of the System. Hopefully the new Interpretation Office in Washington will pick up the ball and support their unrecognized wonder children.

It is not easy for an agency steeped in traditional interpretive programs to perceive a larger picture than it has in the past. Especially with something seemingly as intangible as interpretation has always been. Perhaps assumptions would be the place to begin expanding. Traditional interpreters have both consciously and unconsciously made four assumptions about their work. First, and perhaps most important, interpretation has been made available where little doubt existed about its need. It has always been assumed that interpretation was desired before it was programmed. Second, subject content of interpretation has never depended on anything other than itself for promotion. The theme of an interpretive program supported by the facts was always assumed to be the sole, necessary selling point. Third, subject relevance only appeared in the disciplines of natural and human history. Recently this assumption is being abandoned by metropolitan parks and cultural parks through performing arts interpretation. Fourth, and not the least, interpretation is assumed possible only in parks and recreation facilities that easily provide for the first three assumptions. It has been assumed that interpretation should take place in *most* National and State parks. With these assumptions accepted as they stand, there is little hope of success for interpretation in national or state recreation areas.

The big picture should certainly not be as gloomy as this suggests. An expanded consideration of each of the assumptions will anxiously invite interpretation into the recreation area. First, it must be assumed that the visitor is not seeking out interpretation as a preconceived activity. Some effort must be made to instill in the activity-desires of the visitor, the value of interpretation. Second, an attraction factor will have to be added to interpretive programs. Some aspect of sensationalism or gravitation will be necessary to draw individuals into the interpretable moment. Third, subjects for interpretation can go beyond natural and human history. Subjects such as sociology, economics and site management may be included to give some immediacy to programs. And fourth, as a National Park Service or State Park Service employee, it is valid to assume that interpretation should take place in *all* System areas. If one can accept these altered assumptions as part of the scope of the interpretive foundation, then one should be in favor of interpreting the resources in the nation's recreation areas.

The nitty-gritty of interpretation calls for specific ideas on theme, interpretive vehicle, and mode of presentation. When asking if these three items comprise a formula for successful interpretation, it is difficult to feel complete in the questioning. Ideally there would be a formula for any specific interpretive need. But when talking in terms of general recreation area types, the variables are too numerous and too weightily to handle with neat formulas. A fourth set of variables, beyond the three mentioned plays heavily in interpretive planning. An attempt to consolidate them into a distinguishable category has been difficult and, scientifically, may be absolutely out of line. But, for the purpose of suggesting a direction in which to proceed, it is possible to call these variables "conceptual parameters to interpretation." These parameters provide the degree of nitty-gritty necessary to get off the ground.

The parameters to be suggested aim to help the interpreter achieve two things. First, they hope to identify a starting point for interpretive planning efforts and push them in a positive direction. Second, they attempt to limit the lateral expansion of planning efforts to keep tangible ideas from mushrooming into pure theory. It is not the purpose of this article to tickle the fancy of the academician, but rather to spur the efforts of interpretive practitioners.

Multiplicity of offerings is another important asset to the interpreter at a recreation area. The listing of parameters attempts to provide a wide range of starting points. The wider the planning horizon, the greater the chance of more good interpreters being successful in their efforts.

Please do not look too hard at these parameters. Try not to find any meaning beyond what is evident in the wording. Realizing that a few previous sections of the article may have been difficult to wade through, it is the author's intent to be as forthright and practical with the parameters as possible. Herein lies the saving value of all of the preceding verbiage. Accept it at face value.

The parameters have been divided into two major sets. "*Cognition*" is the title describing the first set. It merely suggests a group of parameters dealing with a subjective understanding of the state of mind of the visitor. The second set is labeled "*Logistics*" and focuses its attention on the "*what, when, and where*" of interpretation.

To apply the parameters to an interpretive planning effort, simply take one or several in varying arrangements and keep them in mind when laying out the theme, vehicle and mode of presentation. Beyond orienting initial thoughts, the parameters should have the greatest impact on the mode of presentation.

COGNITION

1. As reported by Fields (1972), recreation activities and perhaps interpretive desires are defined more so by the social group than by the leisure setting. The same user group looks for similar benefits in recreation activities, interpretation included, no matter how the park or recreation area varies from one place to the next. Key point—get acquainted with your visitor groups and what benefits they seek to derive from other areas as well as your own. Hints as to acceptable subject matter lie hidden in such explorations.



2. Activity preconception may have to be altered in order to incorporate motivation for learning or inspiration. Interpretive programming may have to be expanded beyond the recreation area boundaries. Such an effort would be called public relations but justifiably falls under the title of interpretation when directly linked with other thoroughly planned on-site interpretation.

3. The value of personal contact may be increased by the presence or absence of a uniform. Perhaps a changing suit of dress to conform with changing interpretive themes. At Lake Meade, why not T-shirts with thematic logos printed on the front to identify the interpreter as well as a weekly interpretive theme?

4. The "challenge" of an interpretive activity may elevate its attraction if maintained between "too easy" and "impossible." The open-space classroom concept has adopted small, rather equally qualified groups as the key learning arrangement. Large groups tend to cover too wide a range of capabilities thus defeating the challenge of a problem for the fast or the extremely slow learners. Interpretation audiences have fast as well as slow learners. Reaching them is merely a matter of providing a range of challenges and letting the visitor identify with those of the right degree.

5. Excitement of the unknown may be introduced to activities by using the screening affect of water, darkness, distance, etc. The imagination is certainly an asset to any interpretive program. The author had his most memorable campfire experience at Mesa Verde National Park several years ago. The interpreter, using good communication, the light of the campfire and the cover of the night, held the audience's imaginations in the palm of his hand as he recreated for them the daily routines of cliff dwelling life. There is no reason distant images, silhouettes, night sounds, and underwater treasures could not add to interpretive programming.

6. Fields (1972) also encourages harnessing with-in group communication and by all means discourages working against it. For those familiar with elementary environmental education programming, the first few outdoor explorations seem rather chaotic and educationally invaluable. The students are talking a mile a minute, by no means following in a straight line, and usually really enjoying themselves. Such a change from traditional education programs. But as in the open space classroom, a close ear to separate conversations will reveal a true learning experience taking place. To interrupt the conversations for unnecessary discipline, or to show off one's knowledge, is to work against the with-in group communication. By all means, the exciting learning circumstances are in most cases better than the classroom lecture.

7. Consider how the activity will reward the participant immediately and in the long run. This parameter is self explanatory and usually agreed with in all interpretive circles.

8. Toffler (1970) makes an interesting observation in his book *Future Shock* that the rate of message reception by the American society, generally, has increased frenetically over the last fifteen years. This presents a question. Is that to suggest that interpreters should keep up with the rate of message conveyance typical of radio, television, magazines and newspapers, or should interpretation slow up message delivery to relieve the visitor of the hectic pace? The answer remains unfound. In building publications, signs, and mass media programs, keep this in mind. This may help identify out-of-date programs.

9. "Obsolescence" may be considered an institution in itself, that plays an important role in the group's attraction to repetitive programs. As Dave Dame, Superintendent of the New York City Group of National Parks, points out, "Fifty per cent of your programs should be stricken every six months and replaced." This is one assumption he operates under in his evaluation process. In some areas, weekly, biweekly, or monthly changes may be a real and constant problem if you are not of the right mind. If you are of the right mind, you may receive a just reward for such efforts.

Why not T-shirts with thematic logos printed on the front to identify the interpreter as well as a weekly interpretive theme?

10. "Instant heroes" is a phenomenon described by Toffler (1970) that points out the instant receptivity of a group to an individual or item because of the effectiveness of mass communication. Usually the fame is short-lived as the audience is always looking for new, readily available sensations to replace the old. This phenomenon may have some bearing on the impact of new programs and the duration of sensational ideas.

11. Vicarious associations develop between individuals, and between items and individuals. Such associations are important in formulating value preconceptions and attractiveness of areas for education purposes.

12. Messages usually come in three forms as noted by Toffler (1970):

- a) uncoded—direct mental reception of an object in one's environment.
- b) coded—indirect mental reception of the environment through language or other symbols
- c) engineered-coded—planned linguistic messages, i.e., TV commercials; news broadcasts; rehearsed speeches.

This seems to be a problem of effectiveness vs. efficiency. Interpretation of a resource is usually optimized by direct contact with the resource and an interpreter. When dealing with a fragile environment and large numbers of people though, the efficiency of a movie, or slide program, at a visitor center may preempt the personal touch. When trying to decide the best route, remember there are at least three degrees of message conveyance.

13. Advertising creates dissatisfaction. Not only should advertising do this, but interpretation should also provoke a feeling of dissatisfaction. If not only for more knowledge on the individual's part, perhaps for improvements in the community environment as a whole.

14. Finally, Toffler (1970) points out that, generally, Americans are an instrumental people—thinking in terms of the purposes and goals of an activity rather than the activity itself. In recreation areas, interpretive activities may attract visitors by promising them a product to take away. Then, once they are engaged in the activity, subtly promote the process rather than the product. Leisure activities tend to have their greatest value in the act of doing, as opposed to the product. This may suggest the direct link between recreational activities and interpretive activities. Remember though, that interpretation does attempt to inspire, provoke, and educate.

**Go beyond park personnel
for presenting materials**

LOGISTICS

1. Consider special times of the day that may make people more receptive to messages, such as sunrise, sunset, night time, immediately after meals.

2. Exploit opportunities when the visitor is acting out of habit and his mind is free to receive other messages. Lulls in activity may occur at water pumps, gas pumps, lavatories, trailer pumpout stations, etc.

3. Go beyond park personnel for presenting materials. Special interest groups, influential individuals and local commercial establishments are examples of entities employed at present to help carry recreation area messages.

4. Isolate groups or individuals to decrease interference from other activities. Intrusions can be minimized by isolating groups on a raft in the lake, on an island or in little-used areas of the site.

5. Consider the length of programs beyond traditional presentations—minutes, hours, days, weeks.

6. Don't misallocate efforts by presenting the same information repeatedly to the large percentage of repeat visitors.

7. Progressive activities may be programmed in several sessions covering various time periods and degrees of complexity.

8. Make an allowance for and publicize an interest in feedback on interpretive efforts. If the "repeat" visitor is given an opportunity to affect program changes and see results, greater interest may be manifest in the programs.

9. The concept of "substitutability" may help identify programs in other leisure settings that would be appropriate for the same visitor group in your area. Fantastic things are happening in metropolitan parks that could easily and successfully be transferred to a recreation area.

10. Try to keep group in an enjoyable activity environment.

11. Identify areas for strict interpretation for those who are cognizant of such opportunity.

12. Themes may be just as appropriate for designated time periods as they are for special program efforts.

SWIKOE

SWIKOE! An example of combining several parameters presents a program with a logo—SWIKOE! This is short and catchy for swim-hike-canoe. An interpretive tour including these three modes of transport may be attractive. The logo can define the single activity, a week of numerous activities revolving around swimming, hiking, and canoeing, or a season-long progressive interpretive program. T-shirts with the logo printed on them may be worn by the interpreters or may be given out to participants. Specific areas within the recreation area may be identified as strictly SWIKOE areas and reserved for relative interpretive programs. The term SWIKOE may be pushed beyond the park by radio, TV or any other media. It is up to area interpreters to define the resources, vehicle and mode of presentation of SWIKOE. The other considerations are suggested by the parameters.

The utmost in egotism is to declare that you've found all the answers, named all the names, or counted as high as can be counted. The parameters are limited, short, and sweet. By no means is the list complete. It merely represents an effort to push thoughts about interpretive planning beyond traditional patterns.

Interpreting for urban populations in high-density recreation situations necessitates programming beyond the entrenched, outdated interpretive heritage of most park systems. It seems obvious that any approach that suggests different variables to be accounted for in planning, not heretofore labeled, is a step in a positive direction.

The parameters will stand on their own. No luxurious wrap-up is needed. If anything can be provoked in the reader it should be another parameter for the list. Come along recreation areas—lets expand beyond our limits and interpret our worth to the world.

REFERENCES

- Toffler, A. 1970. *Future Shock*. Random House, Inc., New York. 561 pp.
- Field, D. R. and J. A. Wagar. 1972. *Visitor Groups and Interpretation in Parks and Other Outdoor Leisure Settings*. From a paper presented at the Third World Congress of Rural Sociology, Baton Rouge, La. 22 pp.
- Van Matre, S. 1972. *Acclimatization*. American Camping Association, Martinsville, Indiana. 138 pp.

INTERPRETING PARKS FOR KIDS — MAKING IT REAL



While there are various definitions for interpretation, most agree that either the transmission of information to visitor publics or the stimulation of a desire to acquire information is a key aspect. Simple as it may sound, the matching of an interpretive approach and material with the appropriate audience is perhaps the most difficult challenge facing those responsible for the array of public contact programs now offered by the National Park Service and equivalent preserves.

All too often the audience has been taken for granted, misread or simply incorrectly identified. Elsewhere several writers have indicated that the manager's conception of the visitor, who he is and what he seeks in recreation places *differs* from what the visitor assumes himself to be and what he seeks in leisure places (Clark, et. al, 1971). This not uncommon finding is perpetuated in the "mass" oriented interpretive programs prevalent in many recreation places—the assumption being, all visitors are alike. But all visitors are *not* alike. Instead a *diversity* of visitor groups can be found in recreation places like National Parks. The interpretive programs offered must also vary in intent, content and approach (Field and Wagar 1973).

The basis for assessing differences are numerous. Visitor publics vary in terms of the frequency with which they come to parks, and in previous experience with outdoor leisure places. Perhaps the most obvious difference among visitors is with regard to age. Yet, an assessment of programs offered reveals a low number of specifically designed interpretive options for either the young or the old.

This paper is directed toward one segment of the visitor public—the children. Its purpose is to aid in "connecting" interpretive programs with children. Getting connected requires:

1. An understanding of the developmental phases of childhood growth and how they offer opportunities and limitations for children of various social and chronological ages.
2. Consideration of the importance that group life has on children, and how social groups can affect interpretation.
3. An understanding of three basic interpretive approaches which should be central to any program that deals with children.

by Gary Machlis and Donald R. Field

**“. . . to find the human
key to the inhuman
world about us;
to connect the individual
with the community,
the known with
the unknown; to relate the
past with the present
and both to the future”**

(P. L. Travers, *Only Connect*)

Any fruitful approach to children's interpretation must be based on a sound conceptual framework of the way children behave. Interpreters may ask, "Under what conditions will a particular program be exciting and effective for children?", or "How can we design an interpretive program for school-age youngsters?" The answers lie in understanding child behavior.

When examining children's interpretation it is useful to think in terms of communications flow. To be connected with children, the message must pass through the interpreter, the medium of communication being used, and the social situation in which it is being delivered—all before it reaches the child.

Message → Interpreter → Medium of Communication →
Social Situation → The Child

Each of these factors has the potential to encourage effective interpretation, or to discourage such efforts. If the message is incomplete, the interpreter inarticulate, the equipment jams, the screen is torn and the light is too bright in the room, there may be a barrier to communication. If the social environment is inappropriate, the message may not be received. If the child is not developmentally mature enough to participate at the level of an interpretive program, getting connected is extremely difficult. Hence, understanding the behavior of youngsters in each developmental phase will help in providing interpretation that truly connects with the young visitor.

HOW TO INTERPRET FOR DIFFERENT AGE LEVELS

This same sort of negative/positive potential can be of value in looking at the phases of childhood development. In each phase, there are characteristics that can act as limitations on getting connected and others that can act as motivators. *Children's interpretive programs need to exploit those characteristics that act as motivators.*

If 5 year olds learn primarily through the sense of touch, then interpretive exhibits which allow tactile responses will motivate these children. Exhibits labelled "don't touch" will be limited in their own effectiveness.

In discussing developmental phases of childhood, many cautions must be observed. These phases are purely conceptual, and no child goes to sleep one night in the latency period to awake as a pre-adolescent. Rather, there is a continuum of development wherein physical, emotional and cognitive changes gradually occur. These changes happen at different chronological ages from child to child and vary from generation to generation.

To further complicate matters, children may be in transition from one phase to the next, or may just be developing at a slower chronological rate. However, Figure A is useful as a rough guide to the developmental phases of childhood. As one can see, each phase includes both limiting and motivating influences.

For the pre-schooler, who is cognitively just beginning to make associations of cause and effect, interpretation of simple natural relationships can be terribly exciting. They have abundant energy and large active movements. Their interest span is short, and interpretive programs should be constructed in small sequential units. They are primarily self-centered and work better individually. The pre-schooler is concerned with scale and "big and small" are important concepts.

An interpretive program that involves the children physically in a "miniature ecosystem"; running and climbing up small valleys and along creeks and streams. There are natural places to hide, logs to cross and all at a scale appropriate to the children.

Development Phases of Childhood

Developmental Phase	Age	Physical Development	Cognitive Development	Socialization	Adult Relationships
Pre-school	2-5	Growth rapid, but is slowing down Abundant energy Active movements Males and females develop at slightly different rates equalize at about 5	Developing memory, vocabulary Making associations of cause and effect Primarily learns through the senses	Self-centeredness Bases relationships on what he or she can "get" from others	Primarily the caring person, usually the mother
School-age	5-9	Growth more gradual Finer muscle coordination, yet active movements still required	Interest span increases Comparison becomes important	Strong group loyalties with pair relationship very important	First break from home begins relationship with other adults
Pre-adolescent	9-12	Desire fine muscle coordination Strives to attain specific skills Wide variation in development	Concerned with things rather than ideas Ability to articulate curiosity	Learning to cooperate and enjoy group life	Need to find parent substitutes in teachers and group leaders
Adolescent	12-17	Onset of puberty Rapid growth and development and lack of fine motor coordination Awkwardness due to growth Girls developing faster than boys	Interested in ideas Seeks specific and authentic information Desire for intellectual freedom	Needs peer group support Testing tentative adult relationships	Conflict with adults Desire for independence

Adapted from Gertrude Wilson and Gladys Ryland, *Social Group Work Practice*, 1949.

At about 5 years of age, the child enters into what can be called the school-age phase. Cognitively, comparison becomes a prime mode of analyzing information. Interpreters have assumed that school-age children are interested in factual data concerning natural history. "The tree is 110 feet tall." The interest may be there, not with the data as such, but in how this particular tree measures up to the *tallest* tree in the area. Comparisons can make data come alive for the school-age child.

The school age child is only tentatively beginning to form relationships with adults outside the family, briefly leaving the protection of the caring person, usually the mother. Physical growth becomes more gradual.

Physical growth continues into the preadolescent phase, which begins around the age of nine. There is wide variation in development from child to child, interests and curiosities varying even more. The pre-adolescent is beginning to enjoy group life and is finding parent substitutes in teachers and group leaders. The credibility of the interpreter in the eyes of the child becomes extremely critical. There is a striving to attain skills and a concern with things rather than ideas.

A "living history" program where groups of children could learn about frontier baking by grinding flour, stoking the oven, and eating the final product.

This concern for things rather than ideas changes as the adolescent phase begins, at about 12-13 years of age. There is a desire for intellectual freedom, and for authentic information with which to make independent decisions. The adolescent is struggling for independence, yet critically needs peer group approval. An interpretive program that allows for teenage leadership and self-discovery is apt to be more effective than one based on adult supervision and fixed rules.

A program of volunteer environmental clean-up projects, bringing back trash from high mountain country, or teenagers leading younger children on interpretive walks.

The first goal in getting connected is to use the motivators inherent in each developmental phase to best advantage.

CHILDREN AND SOCIAL GROUPS

More than any other segment of our society, children participate in interpretive experiences while in a group. A family may visit an interpretive center, a school class may take a trip to an historical site, or a group of campers may go for a nature walk around camp. Central to understanding child behavior is the social context in which interpretation takes place. One cannot effectively develop interpretive programs for children without understanding the dynamics of children's groups. Like the concept of developmental phase, social context can act as a limitation or a motivation in connecting the message.

What are some of the variables affecting the social context of the children's interpretive programs?

1. **The purpose of the group.** Before other questions are addressed, it is useful to consider the basic purpose of any children's group. The purpose may be education, recreation, entertainment, or simple delivery of an agency message. The group may be used to offer new experiences to the young, or to supervise and control behavior.

It is also important to ask who defines the purpose of such a children's group. Little league baseball is an example of a children's group whose purpose is largely defined by adults. Children quickly learn the real purpose for their group's existence and often act accordingly.

Is the campfire's purpose to present an agency message and supervise children, or to teach environmental concepts and give kids a chance to relax and enjoy themselves?

2. **Group size.** Group size is an important factor. Active outdoor games may be motivators for large groups of early school-age children and indoor activity severely limiting.

It is unreasonable to plan a structured, passive program for large groups of 8 year olds. They have incredible amounts of energy, are intensely physical, and desire attention from adults. Non-constructive chaos is almost inevitable.

3. **Group composition.** The composition of the children's group also defines social context. Since the interpreter often has little control over group composition, interpretive programs must be flexible so as to adapt to changes in group composition. We need to ask if the children in a particular group are currently in different phases. Or, as is more likely, are some in a specific phase and others in transition? Will these differences effect the group and its purpose?

Other variables need to be looked at too. What is the social and educational background of the children? Sex (the proportion of males to females) becomes crucial in the pre-adolescent phase and continues to influence behavior into adulthood. Partly because of urbanization and the decline of open space in urban areas, interpreters must be aware of the environmental experience of the children. How many different environs has the group been exposed to, and in which settings are they motivated or limited? Children of the city cannot be expected to spontaneously relax and enjoy wilderness environments without previous successful experiences. Fritz Redl speaks of urban children's summer camp experiences:

City children have heard and read about storms, animals, and nature and have used these images as props in their nightmares and day-dreams. What isolated contacts they have made with nature usually were in broad daylight or in the protective custody of father or mother on that car trip. Suddenly all nature is let loose on the child from town. The result is that many children are frightened at camp much of the time. (Fritz Redl, 1966, p. 441)

The effective interpreter will consider these variables in planning and conducting interpretive programs.

There is a group of young scouts preparing for their first campout. It is obvious to the adult leader that while most of the group enjoys group life, several "loners" are involved. The leader offers responsibility for keeping a journal of their trip to several of the loners, giving them the very needed chance each day to relax from the requirements of group life, inherent in scout trips.

The second goal of getting connected is to use the social context of the group as a motivator.

APPROACHES TO INTERPRETATION

The next step in getting connected is to examine various interpretive approaches. An interpretive approach should not be confused with mediums such as films or the written word, or with schedules of interpretive activity. Rather, they are ways of programming built upon three basic modes of human expression: action, fantasy, and instruction. Let us examine each briefly.

1. Action. Children often learn by doing. They learn physical skills such as skipping and throwing by imitation and repetition. They want to be able to do things, and are not truly content with being told or shown. An impatient "Let me do it!" is a signal to the interpreter that his interpretive approach is ignoring this important mode.

Action is valuable in the development of other kinds of skills. Participation in an activity offers children practice in interacting with others, and helps them to empathize with other's emotions, an important part of what adults consider to be maturity. Indeed, sometimes the only way for a child to understand how another feels may be to act out the role.

An interpreter is explaining to a group of school-age children that for the pioneers coming west on the Oregon Trail, winter was a hard and dangerous time. The children do not react. The interpreter asks them to act out winter on the Trail, without fresh food, warm clothes, or adequate shelter. The play acting goes on for about 5 minutes. The interpreter then continues his story, carrying along with him the children's interest and understanding.

2. Fantasy. Maybe the most powerful and far reaching mode of interpretation is fantasy. Fantasy is an intimate and personal thing. It is that region where reason and experience end and imagination begins. To the child there is a potential for fantasy within every experience. The evening campfire becomes a mysterious nocturnal gathering of witches, and only the camp director's "lights out" can break the spell. Indeed, when children are confronted with a basket woven by Native Americans hundreds of years ago, we are inviting them to fantasize about a life and culture far different from their own. Interpretive displays that encourage fantasy can spark interest and involvement, even though the display itself may be quite static.

And yet, while the children are involved in fantasy, it is seldom openly used by interpretation planners and programmers. And why not?

He (the child) does not despise real woods because he has read of enchanted woods: the reading makes all woods a little enchanted. (C. S. Lewis, 1969. p. 215)

Fantasy plays such an important role in a child's interpretation of the world, it should be used as a motivator in children's interpretation.

3. Instruction. Instruction is by far the most accepted and expected mode of interpretation. It is the main way we teach children in our schools, and whether it be by slide show, campfire talk, or museum exhibit, one-way communication of information is the most prevalent method of interpretation.

For youngsters the importance of information is directly related to its usefulness. To know how to identify oregon grape may be mildly interesting, but the information comes alive when it is made known that the berries can be used to stain decorations onto cloth. To be valuable, instruction should concentrate on providing information that can be directly incorporated into the lives of the children.

For children, these modes are intimately related, with each offering strong motivations. The effective interpreter weaves them all together, moving from one mode to the other as the individuals and group require.

A group of coed 7 year olds are learning about salmon. The interpreter begins by showing the children exciting pictures of the large fish, and asks if they have ever seen one. The children are told that salmon can often weigh nearly one-half of what they weigh, and can they imagine being such a large fish in a shallow stream? Could they show what it would be like to be a salmon swimming upstream? "What happens if there is a dam?" asks the interpreter. The children act out climbing a fish ladder, if possible on a small-scale ladder built for such activity. The play acting goes on for several minutes. The interpreter tells the children the rest of the story about the salmon's life cycle. It is mentioned that no one understands why the salmon can return to the same stream where they began life as eggs. The children are asked: "Can you think of a reason?"

Obviously, using these conceptual tools requires a great deal of prior planning on the part of the interpreter. Given the complexity of the groups, he or she cannot be expected to utilize every possible motivator in each interpretive encounter. What is needed is a systematic planning process for children's interpretive programs.

In another paper we shall present such a process in terms of an experimental interpretive program introduced at Fort Vancouver National Historical Site.

"Getting connected" seemed appropriate for the title of this paper because many of the ideas presented germinated while reading P. L. Travers' article on children's literature, "Only Connect." (As if it were a simple task, only to connect with children). There are some important things to consider: the developmental phases of growth, the social context of the children's group, modes of interpretation—action, fantasy and instruction. Books, papers and articles that discuss these concepts can aid in getting connected. But alone, this understanding and discussion cannot create enjoyable children's programs. Getting connected ultimately requires creativity, love of children, curiosity and an ability to look upon the permanent role of "adult" with bemused suspicion.

After all, how would you like to be 'living in a land run by giants without a dime to your name'?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Paul, et. al. 1971. *Children's Rights: Toward the Liberation of the Child*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Clark, Roger N., John C. Hendee, and Frederick L. Campbell. 1971. "Values, Behavior, and Conflict in Modern Camping Culture." *Journal of Leisure Research*, Vol 3 (Summer).
- Field, Donald R. and J. Alan Wagar. 1973. "Visitor Groups and Interpretation in Parks and Other Outdoor Leisure Settings." *Journal of Environmental Education*, Vol 5, No. 1 (Fall). Also appears in *Guidline*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Mar/Apr) 1974.
- Lewis, C. S. 1969. "On Three Ways of Writing for Children" in *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature*. Eds. Sheila Egoff, G. T. Stubbs and L. F. Ashley, New York: Oxford University Press, 207-220.
- Redl, Fritz. 1966. *When We Deal With Children*. New York: The Free Press.
- Travers, P. L. 1969. "Only Connect" in *Only Connect: Readings On Children's Literature*. Eds. Sheila Egoff, G. T. Stubbs and L. F. Ashley. New York: Oxford University Press, 183-206.
- Wilson, Gertrude and Gladys Ryland. 1949. *Social Group Work Practice*. Cambridge: The Riverside Press.

THE INTERPRETIVE ENCOUNTER: BREAKING THE BARRIERS

by Steve Van Matre

Far too many Americans live in walled cities from which nature is banished. We are the victims of a blatant misuse and misunderstanding of the energy of life. The barriers are our own pre-conceptions and prejudices, our fears, and our tenacious clinging to the familiar. As a result, most of our experience with the natural world resembles either a hasty glimpse across the barricade or an armed infiltration. Seldom do we abandon the disguise of conqueror, foe, or looter. Strangely, though, the truth remains that, try as we may, we cannot really separate ourselves from the inevitability of natural processes. We exist as creatures dependent upon the natural cycles of air, water, and soil and on the flow of energy from the sun. The walls we have built do not shut nature out; all they really do is imprison us and keep us from enjoying the world as a whole.

In our work at Towering Pines, in the marshes and forests and lakes of the northwoods, we are trying to revitalize individual relationships with the natural world and illuminate man's ties to the elements. So, by *Acclimatization*, we mean the process of breaking down the barriers which presently prevent people from feeling their heritage of harmony with the natural world. To recover the unity, we employ techniques of involvement and immersion, re-establishing sensory contact with the environment and tying conceptual understanding into a framework of direct perceptual exercises. One important element of this approach is the interpretive encounter.

Interpretation must do more than explain. Explanation does not get rid of the barriers and disguises; it is playing the game by the rules of the barriers, for words themselves are often disguises. Stop and listen. Right now: put this article down. Close your eyes. LISTEN. Chances are good that a tiny, yet persistent voice in the back of your head is naming the sounds around you. Our words are not the sounds, but what we call those sounds. Yet many of us fail to distinguish between the two. Someone else said it best: "We have become more enamored by the expression of the reality than the reality itself." Our mental voice gets between us and the way things really are. We are not our heads. Words alone have a self-defeating tendency. They can insulate as well as illuminate. Some of us even look like our bodies are nothing more than a vehicle for our word-organizing heads to ride around upon!

To succeed, therefore, interpretation must immerse the whole person in the "feelings" of his surroundings. And the very best must rely the very least upon verbal instruction. Too often, words become the refuge of those who cannot feel. For we are bombarded daily with endless words—substitutes for reality. And we have precious little time in which to assimilate this ever-increasing flow of data. Like any organism, when the influx of sensory stimuli becomes too great, we withdraw; often, however, we forget how to emerge again. We shut ourselves off from the natural cycles instead of flowing with them; we encapsulate ourselves behind our stainless steel and plasticized walls. We peer out upon our natural origins through layers of glass, because we do not know how to live in their midst. The gardol shield which mothers are encouraged to wish upon their children is symptomatic of our deepening malaise. We add layer upon layer to the protective barrier because we have lost the ability to live without it. We have sacrificed the full use of our senses, our enjoyment of nature and our unity with life—and all for the sake of a securely artificial world which does not ask us to think about natural meanings. It offers an excuse for not feeling and ends by denying feeling.



In this sheltered world, naming replaces *knowing*. It is not enough, in interpretation, to name—it is still far short of the mark merely to describe. Interpretation must break through the barriers to allow the whole person to be engulfed once again in the flow of natural processes. The old adage is wrong. It is not learning by doing, it is learning by feeling. For in the doing, it is the feeling which counts. If the focal point is something to be looked at, then the individual must be aided in also smelling with his eyes; if it is something to touch, then he must be helped to hear with his hands; if it is something to do, then he must be led to create the visual imagery necessary to place himself in the context of the whole.

I sat recently on an old bench which is an integral part of an early schoolhouse exhibit in the Smithsonian. Glass separated me from the room, but I could feel the wood of the bench underneath. What it lacked was something to help pull me into the context of the whole. Perhaps a recording of the muted voices of children outside at play would have helped me conjure up my presence in an empty room and rounded out a feeling of wholeness in the experience. What was missing was a sensory stimulus that could help me get inside the barrier and feel that I was in that school house, looking at it on its own terms rather than being an outsider looking in. It is true with almost any experience: we can understand better if we can establish a personal relationship. To do this, however, we all need help in getting through our own protective barriers.

Interpretive encounters are carefully planned activities designed to break these barriers through immersion. They are made up of techniques which place the whole person in direct contact with his surroundings. You cannot truly “know” a marsh unless you have been there. Not on a boardwalk or from an observation platform, but through first-hand exposure, right down there among the frogs and plants and muck. With the physical barriers eliminated, the concepts are more easily reached.

All encounters have a dual thrust: the emphasis upon both senses and concepts. The two complement each other and are woven together. You begin by listing the senses and concepts you will treat, then construct specific techniques which accomplish those ends. And that construction requires another analysis: after deciding what you are building *to*, you must evaluate what it is you are building *on*. In order to develop the proper techniques, you must make some cautious assumptions about what your participant already understands. It is hazardous to toss around the term “cycle” if that word connotes a motorbike to your listener!

In the marsh we do not begin with concepts that may not yet be fully understood by our participants. We don't even use the term marsh, nor refer to a community. Instead, we begin by referring to a wet mattress (and some of our youngsters know quite well what that is like!). Then we suggest that this place is like a wet mattress floating in a bathtub (a tub with a few broken places in its lip where the lake water sloshes in). Take note of our assumptions: that our youngsters already have a grasp of the concepts of a wet mattress and a bathtub. And, make no mistake, adults are not para-professionals by virtue of age alone! In fact, they have spent many years in learning how to successfully hide their lack of understanding. Fortunately, children are not so deceptive. If you watch, you can usually tell when your assumption of what you are building on is incorrect. Remember: start where they are, not where you are!

Before proceeding further, it is crucial to explain that we are not saying that it is unimportant for you to be informed about the marsh; we are saying it is not wise to give it all away in one afternoon. Joubert said it: "Words, like eyeglasses, blur everything that they do not make more clear." In this instance, less is more. For you must build, if you are to build successfully, on the foundation of what your participant already grasps. Believe me: you will gain more by giving less. Focus on a few specifics and be sure that these come through clearly. In addition, we are saying that in a barrier-breaking encounter, it is best to have a preconceived plan as to which concepts and senses you want to strengthen. That's right, *strengthen*. They already exist, at least in embryonic form. Concepts and senses are constantly being refined throughout one's life. New data will enhance, re-work, and deepen one's conceptual frames. You never outgrow your need for encounter.

It is also important to realize that barriers are necessary at times. They enable us to function in the midst of a barrage of stimuli. Without any barriers, we would be as dysfunctional as an over-loaded computer. We need to be in control. In order to select the information we need for understanding our environment, we have to be able to let the stimuli through. The key is that when we are using barriers, it must be by choice and with full cognizance of their presence, so that they are used by us, not us by them. Without barriers, we would be overwhelmed by input and distracted from comprehending any of it. We need to be able to focus. But in order to focus, we first have to be able to re-establish contact. Therein lies the value of interpretive encounter.

Finally, there are several guidelines for setting up an encounter in order to give it full impact and effectiveness:

First. To encounter something is to come upon it somewhat unexpectedly. Thus it is fresh. It is perceived a little more clearly because it is perceived a little more quickly. It's analagous to the principle of the tachistoscope which heightens perception by flashing a symbol too fast for conscious manipulation. The subconscious deals directly with the stimulus. The mental words are circumvented. So you don't spell out the encounters for your participants, but the outcomes. In other words, it is important that you maneuver your participants into the experience with a minimum of explanation. Focus upon what the experience will do for the individual, not what it will do to him. Creating an encounter is an exercise in manipulation without coercion. You do not prod, but design the activity to pull.

Second. Good interpreters are not good teachers. To teach implies to act upon; to interpret, to act with. In an interpretive encounter, it is the experience which the interpreter has prepared, and his careful manipulation of his audience in fully savoring that experience, that conveys the learning—not what the interpreter sets out to tell them about. To interpret is to help others bring out the meaning of something. The emphasis should be placed on *helping* others do it for themselves—helping people *feel* the meaning by bringing their entire selves to bear upon it. Don't just talk about adaptation; have them role-play frogs and feel the difference first-hand between their abilities and those of a frog for living in a marsh. Hoist them up on bosun's chairs to experience the perspective of a bird, or crawl like a raccoon along the lakeshore. Instead of giving a talk on the differences between types of soil, have them "wash" in a handful of soil from different places and draw their own conclusions: which is wetter, looser, heavier, darker—which has more rock, more vegetation, larger or smaller grains? Their senses can answer all of these, and more, and the understanding will be less transitory because it is more personal.





Photo by Steve Van Matre

Third. Creating barrier-breaking encounters that are successful is difficult work. It is much easier to simply take a group walk, stopping along the way to explain neat things—"neat" being those about which one knows interesting facts. Planning an experiential "loop" and pinning down specific focal points for the experiences requires preparation and careful thought. Discovering the best locations for developing each concept and sensory device is not easy, but it is necessary if the interpretation is to be at its most effective. Even more difficult, and equally important, is the preservation of spontaneity and "magic" within the structure, so that the experience is more than a series of programmed stops, automatically repeated for each group, each session.

Please don't be misled by the current vogue for sensory activities. Where experiential learning as an approach often fails is in its lack of specific technique. Certainly, we learn best by experience—but that begs the question of what we are to learn. Unstructured, discovery-oriented experiences are healthy vehicles for growth—but learning specific concepts and heightening specific senses may best be aided by carefully planned encounters. Every program should have examples of both varieties. And this brings us to our last guideline.

Fourth. Do not rush out to entirely eliminate the "stroll" approach to interpretation. For a segment of visitors this free-flowing ambling is satisfactory and indeed important. Different people have different learning needs. A wide variety of approaches must be maintained for a wide variety of visitors. But each one must be carefully described so the visitor can make wise choices! Standardization is not the answer. LET ME REPEAT MYSELF. Describe the outcomes as well as the vehicles. Tell people what you expect they will come away with as well as what they will go through.

The interpretive encounter is one vehicle employed in helping people learn about the natural world. It is not all there is. But it is often the most misunderstood and misapplied part of our work. For those interested in techniques for a more open-ended style, we would suggest that you take a look at another of our vehicles: The Quiet Walk. For those interested in leaderless inputs, we recommend our materials for a participatory trail: The Environmental Study Trail. Both appear in our new work, *Acclimatizing*.

(Please contact author before reprinting any material from this article)

