WHERE IS INTERPRETATION HEADING
in the National Park Service, 1965?

An address to the Annual Meeting of the Association of
Interpretive Naturalists, Cumberland Falls State Park,
Kentucky, April 8-11, 1965, by Wayne W. Bryant, Chief,
Branch of Visitor Services

In recent years the National Park Service has been credited with
leadership in the field of on-site interpretation of nature and
history to the traveling American public. Its roots go back some
45 years ago when this activity was called nature guiding, and it
met with phenomenal success as an experiment in Yosemite National
Park during the summer of 1920. Guided trips, museums, and campfire
programs were soon developed in many of the national parks, until by
1932 most of the parks had their own interpretive programs. The
National Park Service developed interpretive techniques through the
years, and improved them but yet today we are still not satisfied
with the overall quality of our interpretive presentations. Our
dissatisfaction, in a large measure, can be attributed to our aware­
ness of the constantly increasing sophistication of the American
public which has been exposed to the ever-improving quality of pro­
grams and techniques being used in the mass communications media.
With this exposure, and the resultant development of taste, the average
American park visitor comes to expect, more and more, the professional
touch in our park interpretive programs. We have learned that we
cannot rest on tradition, but that we must be flexible and keep up
with the latest improvements in design, equipment, and techniques.

We are undergoing a cultural revolution today as well as a technical
revolution. The President's proposed Great Society aims toward
improvement in education, the beauty and conservation of the country­
side, and the beauty and quality of our cities. Interpretation is
a major outlet in the field of conservation education and we, as
interpreters, have a challenge and a responsibility to instill in
Americans an appreciation for our natural and historical heritage.
Our efforts in interpretation should result in better preservation
and enjoyment of the natural beauty across our land--both in and out
of the parks. In the national parks we have used a phrase for this--
"protection through interpretation." and this reduces the pressure on
protection of the parks through law enforcement. In fact, the very
survival of our park systems and any expansion of them may depend, in part, on an appreciation of their values by the public derived through interpretive services.

With the recent programs suggested by President Johnson and President Kennedy and Secretary of the Interior Udall, the Federal Government now recognizes that it must concern itself with the arts in order to preserve both natural and urban beauty. A conservationist is no longer simply a John Muir on the trail with a knapsack on his back, but rather, someone who is seeking the proper coordination of the total environment—which includes the natural scene, the buildings and other facilities on the land, and the use of the natural resources. Any improvements we purposely make in a park—such as architecture, landscape architecture, signs, graphics, exhibits, and audiovisual devices—actually become part of this total environment, so we must be careful to get the highest quality product which will harmonize with the landscape and enhance the interpretation of park features. Buildings in parks need no longer be of logs, but should employ the best in good, tasteful design which complements the landscape.

The total environment concept is explained by Secretary Udall in his introduction to the booklet Road to the Future which describes the long range objectives and goals for the National Park Service. Quote:

The National Park Service has an equal obligation to stand as a vital, vigorous, effective force in the cause of preserving the total environment of our Nation. The concept of total environment includes not only the land, but also the water and the air, the past as well as the present, the useful as well as the beautiful, the wonders of man as well as the natural landscape.

Therefore, in its preservation and interpretive programs, the National Park Service will be concerned not only with natural features and their interpretation, but with the total environment, including the historical and cultural features.

A new trend in National Park Service interpretation is reflected in the recent reorganization of the Service, initiated slightly over a year ago. One of the major changes was the separation of research (or what we call "resource studies") from the Division of Interpretation—research, that is, in the natural sciences, history and archeology. Kenny Dale explained this new research program to you yesterday morning.

With this upgrading in the status of research in the National Park Service, we hope to get better support for our research activities and better coordination of them, whether the research is for the basic purpose of park management, park interpretation, or for the
With our reorganization we are giving extra emphasis to the improve-
ment of the creative and production activities of interpretation,
which are concentrated in Washington, D. C.--publications, museum
development and exhibits, museum curatorial work, and motion pictures
and audiovisual services. We are trying to improve the quality of
our museum exhibits, wayside exhibits, interpretive signs publi-
cations, motion pictures, and audiovisual programs by professional-
izing their planning and production and incorporating the latest in
good design and production techniques. We are shopping the com-
petition for new ideas as well as developing others of our own.

Our publications are getting a new and contemporary look as you may
have noticed--a break from the established tradition. We are ex-
ploring new ways to design exhibits, keeping in mind some of the
points brought out by Mr. Swift yesterday. We are questioning our
previous tendency to tell everything with exhibits. Perhaps parts
of the interpretive story can best be explained through other media
such as audiovisuals, publications, or personal services. We are at
last establishing a long-needed motion picture program and develop-
ing a more professional touch in the production of slide and audio
programs. Our latest new look in slide programs is being premiered
in Appomattox this weekend on the 100th anniversary of the end of
the Civil War.

Added emphasis is being given to training programs for our public
contact, uniformed employees. The new Stephen T. Mather Interpretive
Training and Research Center at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, is now
in its 4th full session of the 8-week interpretive training course,
given semi-annually. With each session we are trying to refine the
course. In addition to our own employees, we admit a few trainees
each session from state organizations, other Government agencies and
foreign countries; so if you have an interpreter you would like to
send to Mather Center, please let us know and we will try to accommo-
date him. New uniformed employees in the National Park Service are
given a 12-week orientation course--including some interpretation--
at the Horace M. Albright Training Center at Grand Canyon National
Park, Arizona. The operation of the Center, however, has recently
been changed. Instead of sending trainees from the parks to the
Center sometime during their first year or two as a Park Service
employee, all new uniformed employees now are first sent to Grand
Canyon to take the orientation course before they report to their
first field assignments. This is known as the Intake Training Program
and is the initial training for our permanent interpreters as well
as for our rangers.

We are placing new emphasis on the improvement of interpretive planning
procedures--to work out a system that will avoid the pitfalls resulting
Tveen building design and construction during our MISSION 66 Program there were no center was designed and constructed a plan for the park had been done. The are an approved interpretive prospectus active structure can be designed and how members, Marc Sagan, is our inter- Washington Office, and last year he subject. Marc has just completed a Handbook to aid a park interpreter prospectus for his park. One of the book is to provide guidelines for the to be used in the park, and the or selection of media and lack of gently plagued us in the past.

A greater participation in the general so we will be pushing it harder from service—but perhaps to a lesser degree—educational program beyond the park both and scout organizations, into the and into adult organizations and service plicate in Conservation Workshops for other materials available for the edu-

conducted by our uniformed employees— evening programs, information service, al hallmark of interpretation in the pfire program, a traditional interest national parks, has become a symbol parks to many visitors. To others the naturalist was their supreme park expen- personal experiences which make last- of our major objectives in inter-formance of these various personal uniformed naturalists, historians, and better training, closer supervision, personnel. With the escalating increase the same time, insufficient manpower had to develop ways of reaching greater of self-guiding facilities and audio- theaters. But we still feel that are the most meaningful services we we intend to continue to provide as in justify in our budget.

say that the National Park Service all its phases, will continue to grow
in importance in the operation of the National Park System and in other park systems, and that we must continue to improve the quality of these services if we are to meet our obligation to the people. We sincerely believe that the "road to the future" in the field of interpretation is one of increasing importance and brightness.