

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
HORACE M. ALBRIGHT TRAINING CENTER
Grand Canyon, Arizona

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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 awareness of the constantly increasing sophistication of the American public which has been exposed to the ever-improving quality of programs 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 countryside, 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

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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

advance of science.

With our reorganization we are giving extra emphasis to the improvement 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 publications, motion pictures, and audiovisual programs by professionalizing their planning and production and incorporating the latest in good design and production techniques. We are shopping the competition 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 exploring 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 developing 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 accommodate 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

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.