

INTERPRETATION IN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND VISITOR PROTECTION

The National Park System offers a special contribution to world culture. The idea of preserving natural, historical and recreational settings for their intrinsic, non-commercial value is a relatively new concept and has served as a model to be followed by other countries throughout the world. While it is true that large numbers of people visit Park Service areas without paying much attention to these settings, it is equally true that many of them are drawn to these areas because of a felt need to put themselves in touch with the historical and cultural roots of their heritage, to feel at one with natural processes that existed before our technological society. The Park Service, then, has the responsibility of preserving these settings, these resources, while, at the same time, providing the opportunity for people to come in contact with them. It is within the context of this responsibility that we all work.

All of our divisions, of course, have different tasks to perform. And yet, these tasks subtly overlap upon each other. While we hope that each protective ranger can be an adequate sidewalk interpreter, we also want every interpreter to be a protector of the park's resources. And, to be an effective agent of protection, it seems to me that each interpreter has to understand that we're all in this together, that our ultimate goal is the protection of the very resources that made our areas special and worthy of NPS status to begin with.

It is, instructive, I think, to take a look at the kinds of issues that are drawing the most public attention to the Park Service. There are the burros in Grand Canyon, Bandelier and Death Valley, the redwoods, grizzly bears in Yellowstone

and Glacier, and the European wild boars in the Smokies. Congressman Seiberling has introduced a bill that would strip the Service of some of our historic preservation responsibilities. We have been on the front pages of the newspapers over mineral claims, clean air, and use limitations.

What should get your attention right away is that all these issues are resource management issues. What must be becoming clear to even the most casual NPS employee is that the scrutiny by our critics, their most biting criticism, is reserved for our resource management policies. I think it is safe to assume that this trend, and I believe that it is a healthy one, will continue. What it should show us is that the management of our resources will be one of the major standards against which our stewardship will be measured.

All very well and good, you say. But how does this affect me, the interpretive technician? The Service, after all, has resource management specialists, resource division chiefs, whose academic training and Service specialities have prepared them to be leaders in the field of managing our natural, historical and recreational resources. How do I fit into the picture?

I would answer that question by asking you to take a close look at how and why most Park Service areas have been established. Beginning with the first National Park, Yellowstone, Park Service areas have been set aside because groups of people have perceived that these areas have contained natural or historical resources of transcendent national significance. The early legislative

landmarks such as the Yellowstone Act of 1872, the Antiquities Act of 1906, stressed the idea that these national treasures must be preserved, that their disturbance or exploitation would diminish and degrade our heritage, and leave us somehow less rich in spirit. Each addition to the system has been a product of this same process. The initial impetus for the establishment of an area flows from the idea that the resource is unique and nationally significant.

Recent management statements have underscored this relationship between an area and its resources. Fundamental to the formulation of any area's basic management plan is an inventory of its resources, the RBI or resource basic inventory. Land classification cannot occur until the resources are thoroughly described and classified. Management decisions concerning the protection and interpretation of the resources can then be made with the resources as the foundation for the decisions. What the importance of this is that the resource, the reason for the area's existence, is at the core of the decisions made regarding the area's development.

What it seems to me that we have to do as interpreters is to realize that resource protections, resource preservation, is not the province of the resource management division, but that it is critical, central, to all of our tasks.

Let me develop this idea a little further, to be a bit more specific as to what I mean. And as I do, I hope you'll begin to get an inkling of a mind set that I like to call a philosophy of protection in relation to resource management. It is this philosophy of protection that I think is an absolute imperative for every interpreter in the NPS.

Think, for a moment, about the kinds of

rules and regulations that govern the activity of visitors to your area. Some govern camping and picnicing, metal detectors are prohibited, entrance to some historic site is limited, wilderness carrying capacities are established. The majority of these kinds of rules and regulations are designed to protect the resources of the area from visitors. Yet, as anyone knows who has worked in an NPS area, the existence of a rule or regulation does not guarantee compliance. Probably the only sure way to guarantee compliance is to fill the area with law enforcement personnel. For most of us, however, this is no real solution. The idea of a Park cop is philosophically, at least, a bit repugnant. The ideal, of course, would be voluntary compliance. The problem that we have not resolved is how to gain this compliance. I submit that by making resource protection at least the implicit theme of all our visitor contacts, we can begin to attack our problem. Education and information should be our primary objectives as a means of gaining voluntary compliance with the Service's rules and regulations.

Let's look, for a moment, at what I mean by this, particularly as it relates to interpretation. According to the Service's management policies, it is the Interpretive Division's goal to develop appreciation among visitors for the area's values, to develop understandings, to see meanings and inter-relationships. Given this goal, the interpreter with a well-developed philosophy of protection sees the golden opportunity. If the visitor can be led to see the value of resource, if he or she senses a bit of the uniqueness the cultural significance or the niche in the system of things that the resource occupies, then that visitor is going to be much less likely to be careless with it, to abuse it, or to knowingly harm that resource. With this type of interpretation, we are providing the

visitor with a philosophical framework through which he or she can view the resource. This is ultimately going to make that visitor a much more sophisticated and careful user of the area. And, by providing him or her with this framework, we are gaining a visitor whose decisions are programmed in such a way that a maximum appreciation of park values emerges through a minimum restriction of his/her activities. He or she complies because of an understanding of the reasons for and the importance of the regulations. He or she is not being coerced into simple obedience.

Now that we have a visitor who is philosophically in tune with the resource, it is our job to let him/her know the magnitude of our resource responsibilities: backcountry and wilderness management, National Registry, historic objects, sites, NEPA, mining and grazing; the list is almost endless. It is my feeling that the Interpretive Division can present very effective programs, using these resource management responsibilities as themes. As an example, let me explain two programs that I've seen to illustrate this point.

In Mesa Verde, I went to an evening program that discussed the cultural influences on the cliff dwellings subsequent to the Anazasi departure in the late 13th, early 14th century. This led naturally, of course, to the discovery of the ruins by the Wetherills in the late 19th century and the early archeological explorations and attempts at stabilization. What the naturalist was doing was subtly dealing with the complex resource management question of how we preserve historic structures. I went away from the program with a much deeper appreciation for the difficult decisions that have to be made because of her program. I'm sure most of the visitors in attendance did also.

Another program dealt with bear management in Yosemite National Park. As the naturalist explained to us the black bear's niche in the Sierra foothills ecosystem, he discussed the Park's attempt to break the artificial food chain between the bears and visitor garbage. He stressed the necessity of restoring a stable population of bear, not inflated by the abundance of non-natural food. He explained bear capture and immobilization and the reason for transplanting bears into less-visited areas of the Park. If you don't see as many bears as you used to, he said, it's because the plan is working. The ideal would be, he continued, if the only bears a visitor ever saw would be wild bears, not those hanging around the campgrounds and garbage areas.

These examples are emblematic, I think, of how the Interpretive Division can support and aid the resource management activities within an area. If individual interpreters keep themselves aware of significant resource management activities and if their contacts with visitors are based on a philosophy of protection, they will make a far more lasting contribution to the preservation of park values than the managers who make the policies.

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