

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Mount Rainier National Park

Division of Interpretation

WHAT DO THE NATURALISTS DO?

- I. Protection: A primary responsibility of all members of the uniformed staff is protection - of human life, park features, and government property. The naturalists work closely with the rangers in this regard, and are ready to help in all ways possible when emergencies arise.
- II. "Interpretation" - What does this word mean?
- A. Webster says that to interpret is to explain in familiar language or terms.

Freeman Tilden in his excellent Interpreting Our Heritage (1957) 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 goes on to give six principles:

1. 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.
2. Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
6. Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of 12) 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.

- B. The naturalists and other members of the interpretive division have, among other jobs, the responsibility of explaining the story of the park in every-day language.
- C. The average visitor to the park is here for recreation, relaxation, or inspiration. To varying degrees he is interested and curious, and wants to know more about the park and its features.
- D. If we can educate him without his being aware of it--in other words, no "lectures"--we will increase the enjoyment of his visit and his understanding of why we have national parks. To quote from the National Park Service's publication Information and Interpretation in the Field: "No other agency of the Federal Government provides so large a part of its service to the public on a direct, face-to-face basis as does the National Park Service. This service is directed to individuals of every race, color, and creed to be found in the United States. The parks are for the people; and one of their fundamental justifications is use by the people. It goes without saying then, that the person who works in a national park in any job which brings him in contact with the public must like people--all kinds of people-- and be able to get along well with them. He must bring to his job a sense of dedication--a conviction that the job is worth doing and a determination to do it well."

All interpreters will be asked questions by visitors. It is on the question-answering level that the functions of the Interpretive Division began. (In this respect, there is no such thing as a "foolish question" if the person asking it is sincere.)

III. History of Park Interpretation

- A. The National Park idea had its first application in Yosemite starting in 1864. The "nature guide service," as it was first called, also began in Yosemite. This was in 1920, and it was first sponsored by Dr. and Mrs. C. M. Goethe at the request of Director S. T. Mather and guided by Drs. Harold Bryant and Loye Miller. These were the first park ranger naturalists. However, as early as 1913, seasonal Park Ranger J. B. Flett, a Tacoma school teacher, gave informal interpretive service in Mount Rainier, and in 1922 published "Features of the Flora of Mount Rainier National Park."

Park Ranger Charles Landes, a Seattle school teacher, was hired in 1921 to develop a program of public information. During his 24 summers in the park, he also worked as a naturalist. Floyd Schmoie, hired as a permanent ranger in 1922, became Mount Rainier's first park naturalist in 1924.

B. The staff of the interpretive division in Mount Rainier National Park consists of four permanent park naturalists and a secretary.

1. To meet the requirements of summer visitors, the staff is augmented by 14 seasonal ranger naturalists, two park guides, two librarians, and two museum aides.
2. Visitor Centers are at Longmire, Paradise, Ohanapecosh, and Sunrise. Roadside and trailside exhibits are at points of interest throughout the park.
3. White River, Cougar Rock, and Ipsut Creek Campgrounds are the sites of informal evening programs.
4. Evening programs are given at the amphitheater at Ohanapecosh. Indoor programs are held at Longmire, Paradise, and Sunrise.
5. Summer interpretive activities at Longmire include:
 - a. The Junior Naturalist Program, for children in grades 3 through 8. This program is held on Thursdays, and is in the process of development.
 - b. Conducted trips, mostly in the form of two-hour nature walks, are offered from the four major interpretive centers of the park.
 - c. Evening programs nightly at Longmire, Paradise, Ohanapecosh, Sunrise and Saturday at Ipsut Creek.

IV. Behind-the-scenes activities and responsibilities of the interpretive division includes planning, programming, building, and maintaining:

Attractive exhibits pertinent to the park. Research collections of plants, animals, and rocks. Collections of human history and photographs. A research library which now contains more than 3,000 books and other publications. A visual aids collection of slides and motion pictures used in the interpretive program. A publications program under the sponsorship of the Mount Rainier Natural History Association.

V. Plans for the future include:

- A. A new visitor center at Sunrise.
- B. Campfire circles at Cougar Rock and White River Campgrounds.
- C. Additional self-guiding trails.
- D. Roadside and trailside exhibits.
- E. Stabilization of historic structure (Longmire cabin) in park.

VI. Publications which will help you:

- "Interpreting Our Heritage," Freeman Tilden, University of North Carolina Press (1957)
- "Information Please!" NPS In-Service Training, 1955
- "Talks NPS In-Service Training Series, 1953
- "Conducted Trips" NPS In-Service Training Series, 1954
- "Campfire Programs" NPS In-Service Training Series, 1955
- "Conservation Quotes" NPS, 1953

Every member of the National Park Service and every employee of the concessioners shares with the rangers and naturalists in acting as hosts to the millions of park visitors. Through the years we have built up an excellent reputation for courtesy, helpfulness, and for taking a personal interest in the welfare of every visitor. If we continue to work together this reputation will never be endangered.

(Adapted from D. H. Hubbard,
Yosemite National Park)