

# Historic Southern Indiana

*Interpretation Workshop, March 2-4, 1998*

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## A Model for Successful Interpretation

Presented By David Larsen

What's the Meaning of This?

Resource Management and Interpretive Advocacy David L. Larsen Most National Park Service professionals understand the mission of the agency as inherently contradictory-- protection precludes enjoyment; and the public's use consumes. Unfortunately, this understanding often conveys the assumption that the public is at odds with the resource. There is a broader and more hopeful perspective on the relationship between preservation and use. Cultivating the public's love for the resource holds the singular possibility for preserving the resource. It is the public's direct and indirect exposures to the resource, their experiences, and the meanings and values they associate with the resource, that provide their will for stewardship. Certainly there is potential for conflict between protection and use. Resolving that friction is the work of wise management.

National Park Service resource management and interpretation share an intense focus. There is no reason for the continuity of either without the objective of stewardship. Absent the work of resource management and interpretation, ignorance leads to poor decisions, neglect, consumption, dwindling constituencies, exploitation, misunderstanding, and enjoyment for no more than a few generations. Working collaboratively, skillful resource management and interpretation minimize the competition between protection strategies and public use and cultivate the visitor's ability to find meanings and value in the resource, and thus desire its preservation.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPERIENCE

Committed resource managers and interpreters both possess an ardent personal devotion to the resources they protect. This does not occur by accident. Most can recall a variety of sometimes subtle and sometimes dramatic influences that profoundly affected their view of resources, their behaviors, and even choice of profession. The origins of these motivations are worth contemplating as they provide a record of the progression toward stewardship values.

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Thomas Tanner asked a group of environmental activists to describe the experiences that were important in the formation of their ongoing pursuits. Tanner discovered "Youthful experience of the outdoors and relatively pristine environments emerge [d] as a dominant influence in these lives." (Tanner p. 23) Not surprisingly other factors such as, solitude, parents, teachers, and books also played significant roles--though not as dominant as experience of the resource itself.

The Tanner study indicated that experiences in the resource had a greater effect on environmentalists than information or knowledge. Obviously, strong feelings for the resource can develop without direct experience. Media and other people can affect individuals prior to a resource visit. Certainly, for the vast majority, a sustained and active commitment to stewardship requires additional learning and exposure. However, such feelings do not occur in a vacuum but are the result of a connection to some personal meaning or value. Tanner's group, when describing influential literature cited "...books that were interesting to them, rather than books filled with abstract concepts, problems, and issues." (Tanner, p. 23) In essence, love for the resource originates in personal meanings and experiences, rather than amassed information.

## THE INTERPRETIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Interpretive Development Program for the NPS seeks to support the visitor's formation of personal relationships with the resource through significant experiences. The intended outcome of such relationships and experiences is an attitude of care for the resource and the movement of the visitor toward preservation and stewardship. The Interpretive Development Program strives to make all interpretation provided by the NPS relevant to both visitors and the needs of the resource. The program does this through a certification requirement that holds interpreters accountable for the quality of their interpretive work. Certification, or the demonstration of competency, is supported by an interpretive training curriculum. This curriculum is based upon three tenets.

### The Resource

The resource possesses meanings and has relevance. Each resource exists because a sufficient number of people found meaning in the place to garner the political momentum and money necessary to establish its preserved status. It is important to note that a given site does not mean the same thing to all people and each site possesses multiple meanings and thus potentially, multiple constituencies.

The resource's meanings, and the information that supports them, can be accessed via media or people. It is not necessary to visit a place in order to find meanings. Meanings transcend the place and are available to anyone who wishes to direct their energies to

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them. Abraham Lincoln, in the Gettysburg Address, recognized this when he said, "We can not dedicate--we can not consecrate--we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract." The same holds for the wild Columbia River that no longer exists or the reservoir-filled Hetch Hetchy Valley. The meaning of both those places, prior to human manipulation, transcend their current states. Yet Lincoln understood that the ground at Gettysburg acts as a vehicle. Lincoln identified the battlefield as the place for "the living, rather, to be dedicated..." The place can afford a singularly powerful, immediate, ongoing, and personal effect.

The resource provides a concrete focus on meanings. It is an icon, portal, or platform that anchors meanings. The resource fixes those meanings in a tangible way and provides an opportunity to learn about, experience, and reflect upon systems, processes, ideas, values, and universal concepts. These intangible resources or meanings are fully as important as tangible resources. The all of its specific parts, such as flora, fauna, features, and artifacts. All successful interpretation can be described as linking the tangible resource, that which is easily comprehended (a relative event, depending upon the individual), to its intangible meanings, that which is provoking. The successful linking of a appreciation in the visitor greater than the sum of the tangible and intangible resource considered individually.

The very tangibility: the reality, drama, beauty, or authenticity of the resource provides its attraction, power, and ability to focus meanings. Likewise, visitor access to the tangible, both physical and intellectual, makes the tangible compelling and provides the opportunity to find personal meaning. For example, the tangible experience of the Grand Canyon and, therefore, visitors' access to its meanings, are diminished by overflights. Likewise, the tangible experience of a resource is diminished if that experience must be indirect or complicated by a great deal of explanation. The attempts of resource managers and interpreters to protect and/or explain a place or thing can obscure and diminish the power and/or explain a place or thing can obscure and diminish the power of the resource and ultimately undercut public support for its preservation. Thus, the visitor's intellect, physical, and emotional access must be weighed whenever a resource management or interpretive decision is contemplated.

## The Visitor

Visitors seek something of value for themselves. The diversity of visitors to national parks is generally acknowledged; however, it is too often forgotten in decision making. Visitors come with a wide range of interests, knowledge levels, backgrounds, and motivations. Many come with a supportive perspective on preservation. Many come with a supportive perspective on preservation. Many, however, do not. That

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reality, even when professionals choose to ignore it, affects all resource management and interpretive actions. Visitors, at least those who visit willingly, seek meanings according to their own world view. Some come for fun, some for entertainment, some for knowledge, solitude, enlightenment, and some others hop to experience the sublime. All are seeking the special--that which speaks to them. They control their own time, have no obligations to the NPS and its values, and have numerous competing alternatives to invest their leisure. All visitors have some potential for caring more about the place.

## Interpretation

Interpretation facilitates a connection between the meanings of the resource and the interests of the visitor.

## Implications of the Rose of the Interpretation

1) The Visitor is Sovereign - The National Park Service protects resources and must establish and enforce appropriate rules. The sovereignty of the visitor refers to what the visitor thinks, believes, and finds meaningful.

All visitor's have a right to their own values and perspectives. Ultimately each visitor determines the effectiveness of any rule or preservation message. The visitor judges the significance of their many own experience and ascribes worth to the resource. Too many resource managers and interpreters view their job as protecting the resource from the visitor. They forget the public owns the resource and ultimately makes the most important decisions regarding its management. Through the bias of their own expertise, NPS professionals are apt to overlook the public's responsibility for the agency's ongoing and future success. The NPS is able to care for resources only when the public supports its actions. All preservation victories occur because enough of the public believes in NPS decisions.

The physical, intellectual, and emotional accessibility of the resource, as well as the skill and breadth of its interpretation, has great impact on visitor thoughts and beliefs. Good resource managers and interpreters use a variety of techniques to make the resource available. They are always attempting to link the interests of the visitor to the meanings of the resource in order to create care and the desire for preservation. National Park Service professionals facilitate access to tangible as well as intangible resources. Ultimately, however, the assignment of meaning to the resource, occurs within the visitor.

It is helpful for resource managers and interpreters to view visitors as existing along a continuum of stewardship values and behaviors. Each visitor holds his or her own place

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on the continuum. Successful constituency building requires moving visitors, wherever they are, along the continuum. The ultimate development of stewardship behavior will likely require a long period of time, repeated visits, and/or influences and experiences outside the resource. It is tempting to concentrate primarily on those visitors who already value preservation. Certainly, those who share this ethic are important and should be nurtured. However, the effective transmission of stewardship requires resource managers and interpreters to also communicate with the vast audience who is not as far along the continuum.

How then should resource management and interpretation deal with visitors who simply want more hotels? Is it enough for the NPS to tell visitors that hotels may degrade the resource? Will that information suffice or will additional reasons be required? The Interpretive Development Program holds that it is most effective to provide visitors with experiences in which they find meaning and come to a personal understanding that more hotels will diminish the resource.

Facilitating a connection to meaning and interpreting resource issues are not contradictory. Actually, the most successful interpretation facilitates a connection to meanings while making visitors' aware of critical resources issues. Interpretive products should be designed with such an outcome in mind. Yet, visitors who have a meaningful experience in the resource will be more apt to support preservation even if they choose to avoid confronting critical resource issues. In that sense, all successful interpretation is critical resource issues.

Fundamentally, resource managers and interpreters must meet visitors wherever they are on the continuum. This may be disquieting, since many visitors value the resource differently than NPS professionals do, but it is the reality of the job. Successful preservation depends upon resource managers and interpreters' ability and willingness to recognize and respect the visitors's sovereignty.

2) Meanings are more Important than Information - Conventional wisdom in the field of interpretation and environmental education say if the visitor's knowledge level is increased, they will become more appreciative of and will thus be motivated to act on "behalf" of the environment. Unfortunately, research does not find this to be a valid claim. In their paper, "Changing Learner Behavior through Environmental Education," Harold Hungerford and Trudi Volk (1991) found evidence that contradicts this traditional way of thinking. They found that although it is one important variable, knowledge of ecology does not, in itself, produce environmentally responsible behavior.

In challenging the old formula, Hungerford and Volk found another factor that does appear to have a dramatic relationship to behavior--"environmental sensitivity," which the authors define as empathy resulting from direct contact with the

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environment. They describe a variety of considerations that influence behavior including action skills, locus of control (the perception that one can influence the issue), personality factors, and situational factors. Most of these fall out of the National Park Services' immediate sphere of influence. Most visitors spend too limited an amount of time in the resource for interpretation to significantly influence locus of control and action skills. (This points to the importance of educational partnerships and efforts like Parks-as-Classrooms--vehicles that provide opportunity for sustained influence.)

Effective interpretation raises visitor sensitivity by facilitating significant and meaningful life experiences. Without those experiences, resource problems and issues have little relevance to an individual who does not already care for the resource. The Turner study, referred to earlier, concluded, "Indeed, all of the data in this study seem to support our long-standing hypothesis that children must first learn to love the natural world before they can become profoundly concerned with maintaining its integrity." (Tanner, 23)

Too often resource managers and interpreters forget their own influential experiences. As a result, many make the critical mistake of attempting to shortcut similar experiences for visitors. Those resource managers and interpreters believe that if they provide visitors with information, simply tell the truth, that they will affect attitudes and behavior. Deeply immersed in long-standing love for the resource, caught up in the day-to-day politics of preservation, intensely aware of threats to the resource, it is easy to take a preservation world view for granted. It is easy to assume others have had the similar experiences. It is easy to presume the value of the resource is readily apparent. It is easy to believe accurate information will cause any right thinking individual to assume an attitude of preservation. Too some resource managers and interpreters, anyone who does not share their values is stupid or the enemy. Unfortunately, this myopia prevents many from successfully communication with those people who make up the vast majority of the audience and, more importantly, the potential audience.

Certainly, current and accurate information is a critical element in the facilitation of meaningful and significant experience. Information is also important for decision making, an increasingly rich relationship with a resource, and the ability to share the importance of that resource with others. But the role of information and abstract concepts must be viewed as supportive of significant experiences. Let to itself, information that exclusively focusses on the tangible and does not link to intangible meanings distracts from and obstructs significant resource experiences.

3) Resource managers and interpreters must be able to subordinate their own understandings of and passions for the resource so that visitors may form their own

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understandings of and passions for the resource. Meeting the visitor on their own terms and facilitation a connection between the meanings of the resource and the interests of the visitor requires the constant interpretation of multiple points of view. The National Park Service must always clearly articulate and aggressively advocate its own positions. However, interpreting multiple points of view is the most productive way to do this.

Interpreting multiple points of view is the effective thing to do.

Classical interpretive theory stresses the importance of relevance in any interpretive product. Freeman Tilden, sometimes referred to as the "father of interpretation," identified the first principle of interpretation: "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." (citation) Multiple points of view, by including a number of perspectives, provides greater potential relevance, increased avenues of approach, and access to meanings. Multiple points of view encourage the participation of a broader range of visitors along the stewardship continuum. More simply put, multiple points of view speak on more frequencies and lure a more diverse audience to find meanings in the resource.

Interpreting multiple points of view also provides intensity, immediacy, and drama to interpretive products. Providing a variety of perspectives provokes, challenges visitors to consider new ideas, and encourages participation in the decision making process.

Finally, acknowledging the voice of different world views is a gesture of respect that engenders dialogue. These gestures of respect are especially important for those who do not feel welcome in parks because of cultural differences or distrust of the government. Gestures of respect require resource managers and interpreters to honestly, accurately, and without manipulation or malice, present opinions, perspectives, and attitudes that vary from their own. When visitors feel that their own experiences, beliefs, gender, politics, ethnic background, economic outlook, positions on issues, etc. are being fairly considered and represented, they are much more likely to consider the views of others, including the National Park Services'.

Interpreting multiple points of view is the right thing to do.

In their article, "The Need for Education, Not Indoctrination," Don Kauchak, Flo Krall, and Kim Heimsath make the following points:

All too often an indoctrination approach to affective goals in environmental education has developed..., with emphasis on the inculcation of "correct" attitudes and values and the replacement of "wrong" views and beliefs. This approach has several

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shortcomings: 1) it stresses persuasion at the expense of true education. 2) it views the learner as an object to be manipulated rather than taught; and 3) it fails to provide the learner with skills necessary to make decisions in the future.

Resource managers and interpreters must acknowledge that the public is in ultimate control of the resource. Much of the public know when they are being told what to think and resent those who tell them. In order for the public to make wise and enduring choices about the stewardship of the resources, they must be allowed to make those choices with full knowledge of the implications of their decisions. The public has the right to participate in the decision-making-process--regardless of their position. While it must always be an effective part of and even lead the conversation, the National Park Service has a responsibility to facilitate the democratic process. When resource managers and interpreters fail to do this, they do more harm than good to the preservation of resources.

Interpreting multiple points of view also provides moral power to the National Park Service position. Resource managers and interpreters must strongly advocate stewardship, but should openly admit their position is one among many. Fairly and honestly describing alternative views as well as the reasons for and the processes by which agency decisions are made, grants credibility to advocacy and furthers the cause of preservation. The alternative leaves the NPS open to charges of manipulation, condescension, and arrogance. To be most effective, resource managers and interpreters must believe enough in the legitimacy and power of their own processes and positions to permit full disclosure of other possibilities.

## The Need for Collaboration

The need for collaboration between resource managers and interpreters to achieve effective preservation advocacy can be described through the "Interpretive Equation" model presented in the interpretive curriculum. The equation represents the components of effective interpretation.

$$(Kr + Ka) AT=IO$$

Kr or knowledge of the resource includes information about the resource, its meanings, its history, its alternative interpretations, as well as its critical issues. Resource management can and must make significant and relevant contributions to interpretation's knowledge of the resource. Interpreting multiple points of view can only occur when full knowledge of those points of view exist.

Ka or knowledge of the audience includes audience demographics, beliefs, the spectrum of possible perspectives on the resource, and motivations. While most National Park Service professionals need a greater understanding of the audience,



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resource management can substantially benefit from learning more about the various publics interpreters deal with on a constant basis. If the public does not find personal meaning in the resource, there is no hope for stewardship.

AT or appropriate technique (personal services, media, partnerships, etc. ) should be based on and selected only when knowledge of the resource and knowledge of the audience is sufficient. Resource management and interpretation (and most importantly the resource) will gain by collaborative efforts and understandings that result in the most useful techniques applied to resource issues.

Finally, the IO or interpretive opportunity holds that interpretation actually occurs within the visitor. This reminds both resource management and interpretation that the visitor is sovereign and will ultimately decide on the meanings, values, and preservation of the resource.

The avenues to effective collaboration seems obvious. Shared information, shared perspective, and shared training are strong beginnings. As important is a good-faith, full-disclosure, equal participation team approach to decision making. These strategies are not new and have been effectively demonstrated in a number of places. However, in the majority of cases, resource management and interpretation have operated independently. This hurts the resource. Perhaps this pattern will be overcome with the recognition that resource managers and interpreters have much in common. They share the desire for preservation, love for the resource, and similar life experiences.

In the end, resource managers and interpreters must ask themselves the same question: How do we preserve the tangible things that make up the resource? The eminent Japanese conservationist Tanaka Shozo put it best: "The care of rivers is not a question of rivers, but of the human heart." (citation) The key to stewardship lies with the realization that the resource, natural or cultural, national or local, derives its value and continued existence from the care and meanings ascribed to it by the public. Those meanings are at least as important as the tangible resources that represent them. The resource endures or perishes in a democratic marketplace where that which is meaningful and communicates its meaning has the greatest chance of survival. Certainly the stakes are very high. Yet there is great hope as Americans already believe in the power of the resource. They have charged us with taking care of those places and with reminding them of why they found them meaningful in the first place.

References:

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## Interpretation and a Professional Language

### A Point of View

David L. Larsen and Bob Roney

#### A PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE

It is difficult--maybe even impossible, to discuss interpretation in a substantive way without referring to Freeman Tilden. It might be argued that Tilden's six principles definitively describe interpretation. Many others, both before and after Tilden, made important contributions through writing, teaching, program implementation, and field leadership. Such contributions can be categorized within and tied to Tilden's structure. It would seem then, that interpretation should be a defined profession with a commonly understood intent, value, and application. However, a gap exists. Professional interpreters have not constructed commonly accepted standards, have not created consistent methods for understanding, applying, and achieving Tilden's principles, and have not created a unified and shared professional language.

Established and successful professions all have their own language. Professional language provides the process through which issues can be discussed; discoveries made, conflicts resolved, standards established, and work improved. Professional language also communicates purpose and value to those who require the services of the profession.

Interpretation is disadvantaged by not having a coherent professional language. Successful interpreters intuitively reach Tilden's outcome. Some also benefit from the example, training, and guidance of others. Many more interpreters, however, fail to reach the vision. Each recalls how they come to learn what they know and form opinions about the way that things should be. Most desire quality, but attach different meanings to the concepts and words they use. Many have little contact with interpreters outside their own location and become imprinted with a site-specific culture. Without common understanding of quality, purpose, and application, but real passion for their own understanding of the resources they interpret, interpreters constantly re-invent the wheel of interpretation.

Many interpreters become frustrated by their inability to communicate their purpose and worth. They feel constrained, unequipped, and even forbidden to carry out the tasks they are sure they are capable of. Lacking the language that would allow them to clearly communicate, many do not even try. The result is an insular group of

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professionals who do not compellingly articulate their own role. Allowing their mission and standards to be inconsistently defined by others thus compounds the obstacles produced by splintered efforts.

Park managers have not been presented with a coherent vision to the mission of interpretation. This is unfortunate, as managers have the greatest need to apply the results of quality interpretation to the protection of the resource. Lacking a clear understanding of the interpretive mission results in too many interpretations of what interpretation is. Some managers understand the potential of interpretation and demand quality. Other managers sense there should be more but don't have the tools, personnel, or history to achieve quality. More managers have never been exposed to the preservation possibilities quality interpretation offers. These managers define the function subjectively and accept low standards or apply their own vision. For understandable reasons, most managers undervalue interpretation altogether. Without an accepted definition of quality or understanding of quality interpretation should be, managers generally fail to demand high standards and contribute to the fragmented nature and often-unfilled potential of interpretation.

## PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF INTERPRETATION

One view holds interpretation to be similar to customer service. Another holds interpretation's role as providing information or education in a pleasant and palatable way. Both of these elements of interpretation are critical. However, a long tradition of interpreters as well as managers recognizes that interpretation should make a more vital and direct contribution to the preservation of resources. Simple courtesy and information are only fundamental building blocks for quality interpretation and constituency building. More is required.

"Interpretainment" is another approach used by many to provide a purpose for interpretation. This perspective is satisfied with a pleasant visitor experience and holds that interpretation is valuable only because it is entertaining. Unfortunately, pleasing the visitor is the primary goal of interpretainment--even at the cost of the resource. Interpretainment comes from a perspective that the audience is not truly interested in the meanings of the resource. It stereotypes multiple points of view and does not care what the audience thinks--just how it reacts. Interpretainment presents information in order to reach a punchline. The result is a memorable personality or media presentation that eclipses and fails to connect the audience to the resource itself.

"Interpreganda" has also been held up as a mission for interpretation. The primary goal of interpreganda is to convince the audience of the singular validity of a particular ideological or agency perspective. Interpreganda does not allow audience members to have and maintain their own perspectives. Interpreganda communicates in one

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direction by discouraging dialogue. It assumes the audience is uninformed and ignores multiple points of view. Like intertainment, interpreganda oversimplifies facts but, rather than seeking a punchline, skews information toward a forgone conclusion. The often will intentioned and passionate insistence upon a single perspective becomes manipulative, didactic, and fails to provide broader relevance. Also ineffective as the audience is not connected to the resource.

## INTERPRETIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The National Park Service's outcome and competency-based Interpretive Development Program offers an opportunity to begin creating a professional language for interpretation. The program sets standards by mandating a certification requirement that holds interpreters accountable for the quality of their interpretive work. These standards, in effect define effective interpretation as creating an opportunity for the audience to form their intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings/significance inherent in the resource. Through a process of peer review, the Interpretive Development Program has established a process that may determine if a given interpretive product, personal service or media, meets this standard.

Certification, or the demonstration of competency, is supported by an interpretive training curriculum. The curriculum incorporates the primarily technical and mechanical language and methods of the pre-existing Interpretive Skills Training Program, as well as the contributions of others. It attempts however to support standards and competencies through language that clearly describes the role of interpretation, as well as the means by which Tilden's principles can be applied.

At the heart of the Interpretive Development Program is the belief that the resource provides a concrete focus on meanings. The resource acts as an icon that anchors meanings. The resource fixes those meanings in a tangible way and provides an opportunity to learn about, experience, and reflect upon systems, processes, ideas, values, and universal concepts. These intangible resources or meanings are fully as important as tangible resources. The entirety of a park's tangible resource acts as an icon as do all of its specific parts, such as flora, fauna, features, and artifacts. All successful interpretation can be described as linking the tangible resource--which is easily comprehended, to its intangible meanings and significance--which is provoking. The successful linking of a visitor to a tangible resource and a tangible resource to an intangible meaning creates an experience for the visitor that can be meaningful, memorable, and even moving. The effect and appreciation that occurs through this linking is greater than the sum of the tangible and intangible resources considered individually.

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Visitors, or the audience, whether in-park or off-site, also play a key role in the foundational language of the Interpretive Development Program. The audience approaches the resource with a wide range of interests, knowledge levels, backgrounds, and motivations. Some come for fun, some for entertainment, some for knowledge, solitude, enlightenment, and some others hope to experience the sublime. All are seeking the special--experiences that speak to them. They control their own time, have no obligation to the agency or its values, and have numerous competing alternatives to invest their leisure. All visitors have some potential for caring more about the resource.

The Interpretive Development Program specifies the role of interpretation as facilitating a connection between the meanings of the resource and the interests of the visitor. Interpretation can thus be described differently than either interpretainment or interpreganda. Interpretation encourages dialogue and allows audience members to have and maintain their own perspective. Interpretation treats the audience as intelligent people and is thus not afraid to present complexity. Interpretation presents multiple points of view and honestly presents facts that lead the audience to their own revelations. Interpreters must always use accurate information, but must realize that the conveyance of meaning through information is more important than the information itself. And finally, interpreters must be willing to subordinate their own passions for and understandings of the resource so the audience may form their own passions and understandings.

## SUCCESS OF THE INTERPRETIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Interpretive Development Program has begun to establish a professional language for interpretation in the National Park Service. The Program began in 1994 and has been guided by extensive development and review at all levels of the organization. To date approximately 50 interpreters have had repeated and long-term involvement in both design and implementation. The group represents a committed cadre who is carrying the program and language to the field. An additional 250 interpreters have participated as writers, reviews, instructors and have had significant exposure to the program. They also spreading the program's concepts. More than 2,000 paid and volunteer interpreters from both in and out of the National Park Service have been exposed to the Program through training. Interpretive leadership supports the Program and an effort to train all interpretive supervisors in the full implementation of the Program is underway. Most importantly, participants report an improvement in the quality of their work.

Response to the Program by those who have had significant exposure has been overwhelmingly positive. The Interpretive Development Program has not attempted to re-define or re-engineer Tilden's principles. Rather, it is attempting to provide

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interpreters with language and models that allow them to "recognize" and make more efficient the elements that make their work successful.

## OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED BY A PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE

In order for the concepts presented in the Interpretative Development Program to truly evolve into a professional language, there are at least five challenges and opportunities for interpretation in the foreseeable future.

### 1. Continued Development of Professional Definitions/Standards

To more effectively contribute to the National Park Service mission of preservation, interpretation might consider developing additional language. What are desired visitor outcomes? To what standard of stewardship should interpreters be attempting to provoke visitors? What role does experience play in appreciating the park? How does enjoyment interact with preservation? How do interpreters generate a common understanding of the purpose and function of the profession to those outside the profession? The very process of coming to consensus on these and other questions, as well as the answers themselves, will make interpretation a more effective and powerful tool for preservation.

### 2. Greater Understanding of the Audience

The diversity of visitors to national parks is generally acknowledged; however, it is too often forgotten in decision making and interpretive work. How can interpretation know more about its audiences? How can it put that knowledge to use? Questions might be asked that go beyond demographics and satisfaction with customer service. What meanings do visitors value about the resource and why? What motivations do visitors have for coming to parks? How will the answers to these questions affect efforts to inspire a preservation ethic?

### 3. Interpretation's Interaction with Other Divisions

A professional language provides the opportunity to communicate the purpose and function of interpretation more effectively to other divisions. With that comes the opportunity to work together more effectively.

## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Resource managers (natural and cultural) and interpreters have a great deal in common. In general, they all have an intense love for the resource. However, resource

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managers have already established a professional language. Too often, the two professions place themselves in conflict because of lack of mutual understanding.

The tangible resource is critical in this relationship. Resource managers strive to manage and protect the tangible resource. Interpreters strive to make the tangible resource physically, intellectually, and emotionally accessible in order to connect the visitor to the resource. This often requires using the resource, or acknowledging and providing perspectives on use which many resource managers see as a threat to preservation. Resource managers have professional protocols, process training, and knowledge of the resource that interpreters too often minimize. Interpreters have understanding as to what visitors need in order to become connected to the resource that resource managers may sometimes minimize.

Visitors need access and the tangible resource must be protected. A critical balance between access and protection is required. How can resource managers and interpreters use their common desire for preservation to reach this balance? How can interpreters increase their often-deficient knowledge of the resource? How can resource managers learn more about the audience? Can interpreters learn to interpret the professional processes of resource management? What opportunities will such interpretation present? Can resource management better understand constituency building and participate in that endeavor?

## PROTECTION

The Ranger Careers Program provides opportunities for greater understanding and cooperation between protection and interpretive rangers. Can the language and training methods of the Interpretive Development Program help protection rangers better perform their resource education function? How can interpreters provide this support in a non-condescending and non-threatening way? How can interpreters better support protection work?

### Harpers Ferry Center

What are the implications of the Interpretive Development Program for Harpers Ferry Center? How will standards and this language affect their relationship with field interpreters? To what extent can the concepts of the Interpretive Development Program apply interpretive media? Can Harpers Ferry Center help explore these issues? How can field interpreters better articulate their vision and support the professional work of Harpers Ferry Center?

## 4. Critical Resource Issues

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The interpretation of critical resource issues is probably the most important challenge that exists for interpretation. The next century will bring increasing and increasingly varied demands on resources. Park managers will have to defend and articulate the reasons for ever more difficult decisions. Interpretation has an essential role in building constituency.

All interpretation that successfully connects the interests of the visitor to the meanings of the resource supports preservation. To that degree, all successful interpretation can be viewed as critical resource issue interpretation. Improving the quality of all interpretation is therefore critical.

## MULTIPLE POINTS OF VIEW

Critical resource interpretation, however, will require an added level of skill. The Interpretive Development Program call for the interpretation of multiple points of view. The Program holds that interpreting multiple points of view is more effective than the approaches of propaganda or interpretation. Multiple points of view, by including a number of perspectives, provide greater relevance, increased avenues of approach, and access to meanings. Multiple points of view encourage the participation of a broader range of audience members. It also provides intensity, immediacy, realism, and drama to interpretive products and provokes the audience to consider new ideas. Acknowledging the voice of different world-views is also a gesture of respect that engenders dialogue. These gestures of respect are especially important for those who do not feel welcome in parks because of cultural differences or distrust of the government. Gestures of respect require interpreters to honestly, accurately, and without manipulation or malice, present opinions, perspectives, and attitudes that vary from their own. When visitor feel their own experiences, beliefs, gender, politics, ethnic background, economic outlook, positions on issues, etc. are being fairly considered and represented, they are much more likely to consider the views of others, including the National Park Service.

Interpreting multiple points of view also provides moral power to the National Park Service position. Interpreters must advocate stewardship, but should openly admit the agency position is one among many. Fairly and honestly describing alternate views as well as the reasons for and the processes by which agency decisions are made grants credibility to advocacy and furthers the cause of preservation. Failing to acknowledge multiple points of views leaves the agency open to changes of manipulation, condescension, and arrogance.

While the Interpretive Development Program makes the case for multiple points of view, it must be asked if interpreters are ready for it? How can interpreters be prepared with the information and skills necessary for interpreting multiple points of view?



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## 5. Leadership Opportunities for National Park Service Interpretation

Increasing threats to resources make it essential that the National Park Service partner with other stakeholders to develop a general stewardship ethic. If the Interpretive Development Program is successful in establishing a professional language for interpretation within the agency, what opportunities might exist for expanding that language to the profession as a whole? Is it in the interest of the National Park Service to have other agencies, academia, private parks, and concessionaires share this language? How will it benefit these other groups? How will their input benefit and evolve the language of National Park Service interpretation? Are there opportunities for the National Park Service to sponsor a dialogue that would explore professional issues?

### ORGANIC ACT

National Park Service interpretation may benefit from once again considering the words and intent of the Organic Act. Recent generations of interpreters have classically viewed the Organic Act as setting forth a dual and paradoxical mission--preservation and public enjoyment. For years the agency has placed those concepts in conflict. Some will argue that, in the past, enjoyment has led to the destruction of the resource. This may be the case. However, a mutually beneficially linking of the two could actually be the salvation of both. The Interpretive Development Program calls for all interpreters to recognize their work as bringing the resource and the audience together so that preservation may provide for enjoyment and so that enjoyment may provide for preservation. In the 21st century, can either preservation or enjoyment exist without the other?

### INTERPRETAINMENT

Stereotypes multiple points of view

Arranges facts toward a punch line

Simplifies facts

Comes from a perspective that the audience isn't truly interested in the meaning of the resource

Doesn't care what the audience thinks - just how it reacts

### INTERPREGANDA

Ignores multiple points of view

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Dishonestly skews facts toward a forgone conclusion

Simplifies facts

Comes from a perspective that the audience is ignorant

Communicates in one direction by discouraging dialogue

Does not allow audience members to have and maintain their own perspective

## **INTERPRETATION**

Presents multiple points of view

Honestly presents facts that lead the audience to a revelation

Is not afraid to present complexity

Treats the audience as a group of intelligent people

Encourages dialogue

Allows audience members to have and maintain their own perspective regardless of any desire or attempt to change them