

Purpose and Value



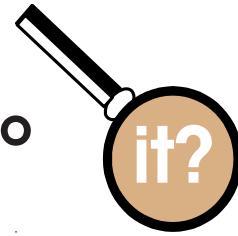
Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.

John Muir



Interpretation

Why do we do



Introduction

Now that we have an understanding of what interpretation is, the next immediate question is *Why do we do it?* As discussed in Module 1-Introduction, most interpretation began with a need to fulfill a management goal. Whether that goal was to garner public support, to control visitor behavior, or to protect the resource, it was clear that interpretive efforts were meaningful to management and driven by the benefits produced.

The purposes and values of interpretation today can be divided into similar categories, benefits directly associated with the visitor and those more closely aligned with management. Although we will make categorical distinctions between various types of benefits, they are all related and affect each other to various degrees. For example, increasing visitor enjoyment of the resource is clearly a visitor-based benefit that has management implications. Regardless of the semantic methodology used to discuss the purposes and values of interpretation, we have essentially two goals with our interpretive programs: to connect the visitor to the resource and to protect and manage that connection within management mandates.

The primary interpretive policy of the Department of Parks and Recreation is to heighten and increase public understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of the natural, cultural, historic and recreational values of California as represented in the State Park System; to increase public understanding and concern for people's place in their environment, and thereby provide an increased desire to protect and enjoy the natural and cultural heritage of this state.

California State Parks and Recreation Commission Statements of Policy

Connecting the visitor to the resource

Connecting visitors to the resource has been a longtime goal of California State Parks. The Departments' Operations Manual (1986) section 1300.1 states, "A high quality interpretive program is necessary to enrich the experience of park visitors, deepen their understanding and appreciation of the natural world and their heritage, and to encourage their support for the preservation and perpetuation of these values."

We connect the visitor to the resource by developing interpretive programs that address California State Parks in one, or more, of three areas: our cultural resources, our natural resources, and our agency values.



Perhaps we should hire poets instead of biologists to write our science textbooks! Undoubtedly, we must simplify our messages and express them in ways that assure more lasting effects.

Steve Van Matre

Cultural

An interpreter can connect visitors to the cultural and historical resources of the park by providing interpretive programs about these resources. Every park and protected area has a cultural history. In many parks, it is a central feature of the resource. Most of the time you will be asked to interpret a culture that is not yours. In addition, many visitors may be coming to your park to learn about their heritage and history from you. There are several techniques and strategies to help you succeed in this delicate process.

Become familiar with the history of the cultures in and around your park and be sensitive to cultural diversity. Remember, the “rightness” of an act or a belief system is determined by the historical context in which it occurred. History is not a fact, but instead an interpretation of the people that recorded it, the time in which it occurred, and those who are listening to it today. James Loewen’s book, *Lies Across America* (1999) provides an eye-opening view of this theory. Talking about sensitive or controversial aspects of culture and cultural history is something we should be doing, but you must remember that the appropriateness of your comments and actions will be judged by the audience of today. What may not be offensive to one will almost certainly offend someone else. Sensitivity, tact, accuracy, and common courtesy go a long way when dealing with cultural messages.

There are always many perspectives from which to tell a story. Be sure that you are accurately reflecting the cultures involved and not simply playing into stereotypes. If possible, seek out living members of the culture by conducting some firsthand research. Remember, this person only reflects *one* perspective of the culture and not *the* perspective. It is not possible to describe every perspective on a culture, and it is not an interpreter’s responsibility to do so. However, it is your responsibility to convey which perspective you are representing and that it is *one* of many perspectives. In Module 3-Communication we will review in greater detail the aspects of interpreting to a culturally diverse audience.

One of the primary benefits of conducting cultural programs is that it helps create tolerance for others. “If (visitors) never learn to enjoy the diversity of their fellow-citizens’ customs, styles, and attitudes, they may be intolerant of those who are ‘different’ and therefore perceive them as ‘dangerous’” (Knudson, Cable, and Beck, p. 67, 1995). Interpretation provides a wonderfully protected and neutral atmosphere through which visitors can come to know others different from themselves. It also provides opportunities for many to discover their own culture and history, which in today’s melting pot society can become lost. Cultural pride and tolerance for cultural diversity are both benefits of providing interpretive programs dealing with culture and cultural history.



Connecting the visitor to the resource

Natural

We also connect the visitor to the natural resource through interpretive programs. The typical image the visitor has is of an interpreter, who they believe is an expert, leading them up a trail talking about the park's plants and animals. Visitors often attend programs seeking knowledge about these resources. "What kind of flower is that?" "What causes the tides?"

Successfully interpreting the resource stems from knowing the place. There is no shortcut. In fact, the longer you are in the park, the more you will realize how little you know. Walking the trails, talking with others more familiar with the resource than yourself, using field guides, listening to questions visitors have, researching the current science, exploring the park/local library, and experiencing the resource will all assist you in successful interpretation of the natural resources in your park.

As previously stated, deciding what to interpret to the visitors is dependent on many factors, and we will review this in more detail in Modules 3-Communication and 4-Planning. For this discussion, it is important to note what the significant resources in the park are. Why was the park unit established? California State Parks calls this the "interpretive significances" of the park. This focuses on the "parks' statewide, regional, and intrinsic values" (California State Parks, 2002). Consider what is special about the resources in your park. In addition to interpreting the significant biological resources in the park, you also want to draw visitors' attention to the details—the biological resources that are often overlooked. For example, the redwoods are an obvious feature of some of California's state parks and demand to be interpreted. However, there are many other biological components of a redwood park, small and often overlooked, that should be interpreted as well. For example, the banana slug, marbled murrelet, and the tan oak are all integral components of the old growth forests and should be interpreted. When thinking about your resource, remember that interpretation should try to illuminate the shadowed elements of the biological and natural resource.

Illuminating the resource for visitors has several benefits. One of the primary benefits of interpreting the resource is visitor and resource protection. Visitors are more likely to protect the resource and adhere to rules and regulations if they understand the resource-based reason for the rule. For example, knowing how fragile the tide pool animals are may result in fewer people taking animals from the tide pools. We know that visitors are more likely to do as requested if the request is connected, not to the management, but to the resource or to visitors (Oliver, Roggenbuck, and Watson, "Education to reduce impacts in the forest campgrounds," 1985; Schwartzkopf, "Feeding of Golden Mantled Ground Squirrels by park visitors at Crater Lake National Park," 1984; Wallace, "Law Enforcement and the 'Authority of the Resource'," 1990; Widner, "Conflict among hikers and horseback riders in the Mount Rogers High Country of Virginia," 2000).

A second key benefit from interpreting the science of the natural resources in your park is that you are providing a public service by educating individuals about an often complicated, but vitally important subject matter. As interpreters, we serve as the link between the scientist and the general public. Educating the public about the importance of our natural resources translates into visitor support and protection of those resources. We will discover in Modules 3-Communication and 5-Programs, how to increase our success communicating difficult scientific concepts to the public.

Connecting the visitor to the resource



Managerial

A third area to consider when creating interpretive opportunities for visitors is the managerial elements of the park. Do not forget to educate visitors regarding the agency for which you work, the specific management perspectives of your park, the recreational opportunities available, and any special management considerations. For example, there are usually critical issues in every park that require special attention and management: the snowy plover, sudden oak death, etc.

Try to develop a thorough knowledge of not only the rules and regulations, but why they are in place, and what the overall management paradigm for the rule is. Talk with your supervisor, resource specialists, and managers about the overall messages they would like the public to take with them regarding the park. Remember, the public does not often share the same perspectives regarding the resource and the management of the resource as does the management. These types of educational programs allow you to bridge those gaps and build a constituency.

There are many benefits to providing interpretive messages regarding the management of the resource. We will review those benefits later in this module when we discuss accomplishing management goals and objectives with our programs. Remember, the motives behind visitors' attendance to our interpretive programs are numerous and varied. The key to overall success is diversity of messages, programs, and opportunities.

We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.

Aldo Leopold

We shall never achieve harmony with land, any more than we shall achieve absolute justice or liberty for people. In these higher aspirations the important thing is not to achieve, but to strive.

Aldo Leopold

Inspiration

Ideally, our interpretive programs connect visitors to the resource by inspiring them. Many of the philosophies of interpretation are written with words such as passion, spiritual whole, and inspiration. This is the ultimate goal of interpretation: *to inspire others to want to explore further, to learn more on their own*. As an interpreter, the greatest gift to the visitors that you can bestow is a path through which they can come to know. To create explorers out of followers is the function of inspiration and



Connecting the visitor to the resource

provocation. Because this type of connection is often an emotional one, it is one of the most powerful ways to connect a visitor to the resource. It is also the type of connection most likely to result in a behavioral change. Tilden spoke of this ability of interpretation to reach and change people when he said it occurs, "...not with the mere recitation of facts. Not with the names of things, but by exposing the soul of things—those truths that lie behind what you are showing your visitor. Nor yet by sermonizing; nor yet by lecturing; not by instruction but by provocation." (Tilden, 1977, p. 38).

Is it education or interpretation?

It is important to distinguish the purpose and value of interpretation from that of education. Although most of our programs strive to impart knowledge to visitors through our interpretive efforts, this is not the overall purpose. The overall purpose is to provoke the audience to want to learn more on their own. There have been several characteristics used to distinguish education from interpretation.

The primary characteristic that distinguishes interpretation from education is provocation; i.e. provoking the visitors to learn more after leaving the interpretive program. Because of the way people learn and process information (see Module 3-Communication), we should be able to gauge the success of an interpretive effort not by how much we have added to their knowledge, but by whether we have provoked them to go out and learn more on their own. An interpretive program is not an end unto itself, but should serve as a catalyst for learning. We are planting the seeds!

The two mission statements below, one for California State Parks' interpretive efforts and the other for educational programs may assist you in further understanding the subtle but important differences between interpretation and education.

California State Parks

Interpretive Mission Statement

Interpretation is a special form of communication that helps people understand, appreciate, and emotionally connect with the rich natural and cultural heritage preserved in parks. It is the mission of interpretation in California State Parks to convey messages that initially will help visitors value their experience, and that ultimately will foster a conservation ethic and promote a dedicated park constituency.

Education Mission Statement

The most powerful forms of education involve students in meaningful experiences that promote critical thinking and appeal to different learning styles. Our mission is to provide educational opportunities both in California State Parks and in the classroom, assisting educators with curriculum needs and offering activities that enable students to investigate, research, and participate in interactive learning.

Connecting the visitor to the resource



Do not try to satisfy your vanity by teaching a great many things. Awaken people's curiosity. It is enough to open minds; do not overload them. Put there just a spark. If there is some good flammable stuff, it will catch fire.

Anatole France

Providing inspiration for visitors is not as straightforward as providing informational or educational messages. In fact, we probably can't give them peak or self-actualizing experiences (see Module 3-Communication for more information on these types of experiences). What we can do is set the stage by providing opportunities for the visitors to find self-actualizing experiences on their own. We can "provide resources for independent exploration" (Knudson, et al, p. 64). We can create programs that attempt to "light the spark" of curiosity and wonder. Helping visitors become familiar enough with an environment that they want to forge their own path is the ultimate method of connecting them to the resource.

A nature guide is not a guide in the ordinary sense of the word, and is not a teacher. At all times, however, he has been rightfully associated with information and some form of education. But Nature guiding, as we see it, is more inspirational than informational.

Enos Mills

Management goals and objectives

The second major purpose and value of interpretation is meeting management goals and objectives. As we saw in Module 1-Introduction interpretation started because of a need to meet very specific management goals. This function of interpretive programming is still very much a part of the value and purpose of interpretive programs today. In fact, it is *the* primary reason interpretive efforts should be undertaken. If the interpretive program is not meeting a management goal, then why are you doing it? If interpretation is not purposefully done to somehow address the mission of California State Parks, it becomes simply entertainment. For example, even the previously discussed purpose of "connecting visitors to the resource" is done to meet management goals and objectives. Increasing visitor enjoyment, promoting recreational activities, and encouraging visitor education are all management goals. In fact, the mission of California State Parks indicates that one of the primary goals of management is to facilitate visitor enjoyment of the resource. Everything we do in California State Parks is somehow directed by or connected to a management need.

There are three primary categories of management goals and objectives that we should meet through our interpretive efforts: protect the resource, protect the visitor, and promote the agency. Protecting the resource is one of the most important things we can accomplish through our programs. Through interpretive programs, we aim to not only protect the resource today, but also to create stewards for tomorrow. Protecting the visitor is another function of interpretive efforts. Programs should always



Management goals and objectives

consider visitor safety. As discussed above, increasing visitor enjoyment of the recreational experience is a primary goal of interpretive programs. Through increasing visitors' enjoyment and connecting them with the resource, we hope that they will not only become stewards but advocates and supporters for the agency, which is the third category of management goals and objectives. The next section briefly discusses each of these management goals and objectives.

Protect the resource

California State Parks was born out of the need to protect the state's natural and cultural

resources. That is the primary function of state parks. "We respect the intrinsic values of both the natural and cultural environment, and believe that their preservation is essential to our health and to the definition of the California identity" ("Seventh Generation: The Strategic Vision of California State Parks", p. 14, 2001). Because the resource rarely damages itself, it is the visitor in the resource that must be managed.

There are two primary ways to view protecting the resource. One is to focus on decreasing the amount and severity of depreciative visitor behavior. Depreciative behavior is behavior that harms the resource. Carving on picnic tables, picking flowers, walking off trail, and leaving litter are all common forms of depreciative behavior. The second way to protect the resource is to increase compliance with rules and regulations. These two perspectives are similar and related. One method focuses on rules for behavior and the other on the outcome from behavior. As we will see in Module 3-Communication, a combination of both approaches is best for overall success.

There are two primary methods through which we manage visitors: law enforcement and interpretation. Rangers and lifeguards are peace officers, having graduated from an academy that prepared them for the methods and techniques necessary to fulfill the enforcement aspects of management. This type of management influences behavior by the "letter of the law."

As interpreters, you are in a unique position to influence visitor behavior through the "spirit of the law." Many researchers and theorists contend that behavior controlled through interpretive means is the preferred method for several reasons (Christiansen and Dustin, "Reaching recreationists at different levels of moral development." *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 1989; Knudson, et al. 1995; Van de Kamp, Johnson, and Swearingen, "Deterring Minor Acts of Noncompliance: A Literature Review," 1994).

The primary reason is that a majority of depreciative behavior is thought to occur, not out of malice, but out of ignorance. In fact, estimates are that on average only about two to four percent of depreciative behavior is malicious (Van de Kamp, Johnson, and Swearingen, 1994; Widner, "Reducing Theft of Petrified Wood at Petrified Forest National Park," *Journal of Interpretation Research*, 2000). If depreciative behavior occurs out of ignorance, then it would follow that interpretive methods of educating the visitor about the rules and regulations would be the most effective means of controlling that behavior.

Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.

Rachel Carson

Management goals and objectives



A second reason to attempt to control behavior through interpretive means is that recreation areas and parks are considered some of the last places that humans can be free. To escape the rules and restrictions of society is one of the driving factors that push people into the outdoors (Knopf, “Human Experience of Wildlife: A Review of Needs and Policy,” *Western Wildlands*, 1988). Our efforts to protect the resource must consider this motivating factor. If we manage and regulate people too closely, the experience itself, which we are also charged with protecting, will be lost. We must protect the resource, but not necessarily at the expense of the visitors’ experience. Balance is the key to successfully meeting this dual mandate. *Interpretation provides a wonderful opportunity to both protect the resource and provide for its use and enjoyment.*

A third reason to control behavior through interpretive means is that we may have a better chance at influencing long-term behavioral change through interpretation rather than regulation. The presence of a uniformed officer probably serves as a discriminative stimulus preventing depreciative behavior from occurring only while in the presence of the officer (Van de Kamp, et al., 1994, Geller, 1994). For example, speeders slow down temporarily when in the presence of a police car. This type of behavior modification may not result in any long-term effect. In other words, seeing one police car probably does not transfer into slowing down all the time. In addition, getting a speeding ticket may only serve to make you angry and slow you down for a little while, but not change your driving behavior over the long term. Following this logic, many researchers contend the best method to modify depreciative behavior is through education and other light-handed management techniques (Chiaken and Eagly, 1993; Petty and Cacioppo, “The effects of involvement on responses to argument quantity and quality: Central and peripheral routes to persuasion.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46, 69-81, 1984; Latane and Darley, 1975; Widner and Roggenbuck, 2000).

Interpretation should be taken out of the realm of entertainment. It must become the serious business of education. I am not suggesting that we eliminate entertainment, but all too often interpretive programs have as their primary objective entertaining people. Entertainment should not be the end product, but it can be a means toward the end product, which should be education.

William Penn Mott, Jr.



Management goals and objectives

Protect the visitor

Another purpose of interpretation is to protect the visitors. There are two primary elements to this protection: protection from each other and protection from hazards and dangers in the resource itself. We are charged with increasing the visitors' safety while in the resource and minimizing the amount of visitor conflicts.

Many of our parks are small and sustain an ever-increasing number of visitors pursuing a vast array of recreational activities, many of which are in fundamental opposition to each other. For example, kayakers may find their recreational experiences hampered by the presence of motor boats. Visitors have the *right* to use the resource, but not the *right* to destroy other users' abilities to enjoy the resource. Managing this situation is a very delicate task. Interpretation provides the opportunity not only to manage the problem but to help visitors understand it as well. Many times it simply requires educating users about each other and pointing out how similar they really are to each other (Jacob and Scheryer, "Conflict in Outdoor Recreation: A Theoretical Perspective," *Journal of Leisure Research*, 1980; Widner, 1994). One of the best methods of accomplishing these objectives is by roving, which we'll discuss at length in Module 10-Roving.

In addition to protecting the visitors' experience, we must also protect their physical safety. This is one of the basic needs outlined by Maslow (see Module 3-Communication), and until it is met, visitors are often unable to achieve any higher needs and goals from the resource. Whether they are poisonous plants, dangerous undertows, steep cliff edges, or venomous snakes, there are often numerous elements within each park that, without proper consideration, pose a threat to visitors' safety. As stated in the section above, much of the danger comes from a lack of knowledge about the resource and not an intention to perform dangerous behaviors. Interpretation often serves as the most effective means to address the problem.

Although certain forms of recreation lend themselves to danger more than others (e.g., rock climbing as opposed to taking pictures), ignorance can make one as dangerous as the other (e.g., taking pictures too close to a 1,000-pound rutting elk). It is through interpretation that we educate visitors to the potential hazards in the resource and the proper methods needed to protect visitors as much as possible.

The actions of men are the best interpreters of their thoughts.

John Locke



Promote the agency

The above management goals and objectives of interpretation can be viewed as immediate and short term. For example, we hope that while visitors are on site, they take care of the resource, do not get into dangerous situations, get along with others, comply with rules and regulations, and become connected with the resource. The third goal is to promote the agency. This goal stems from being successful in the short term but is itself considered a long-term goal of interpretation. In other words, if we connect them with the resource, are successful in educating them about the need to care for the resource, and protect their experience while recreating, we are more likely to garner long-term support from the visitors for the agency's goal and missions.

These long-term effects are evidenced in voting behavior, legislative support, financial support, and constituency formation. The most recent result of this type of support came in 2002 when California voters approved the largest state park bond in U.S. history at \$2.6 billion dollars. This type of support would not be possible were it not for the successful accomplishment of the on-site, immediate goals of our program.

This long-term goal demonstrates the interconnected nature of everything we do in state parks. From a friendly, welcoming voice on the phone to well-thought out educational programs, everything we do makes an impression on the visitor and contributes to the overall image of the agency. This overall image and conception the public has regarding the purposes and values of our parks and interpretive programs translates into money, votes, and overall support for the Department. In turn, this support results in our ability to do our jobs effectively and to provide those publicly-desired services and opportunities.

What's ahead



Now that we have a firm understanding of what interpretation is and why we conduct programs, let us turn to the foundation of every program: the basic communication process. In Module 3-Communication we will review the fundamental communication process and discover *how* to create effective messages for the public. This next module will form the foundation of all other communication forms and program types covered in this handbook.



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Purpose and Value





Self assessment



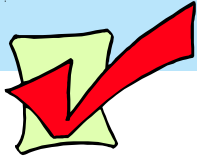
Answer each question in the section below before reviewing the material in Module 2-Purpose and Value. The answers are not provided. Check your answers with your colleagues and as you read Module 2-Purpose and Value. Items from the self assessment may be reviewed and discussed in class.

- 1) What are two reasons we conduct interpretive programs in California State Parks?

- 2) Education is the same as interpretation. (Explain your answer.)
 - a) True
 - b) False

- 3) How do we connect the visitor to the resource through interpretation?

- 4) Which is **not** a benefit of providing cultural resource interpretive programs?
 - a) Building cultural tolerance and appreciation.
 - b) Increasing pride and promoting cultural diversity.
 - c) Teaching the one true story of a culture to the public.
 - d) Conveying the historical significance of cultural groups to the public.



Self assessment



- 5) Is it more important to protect the resource or provide for visitor enjoyment of the resource?
Explain why.
- 6) The majority of depreciative behavior in parks is due to:
- a) Malice
 - b) Ignorance
 - c) Stubbornness
 - d) Fear
- 7) How can interpretation help protect the resource?

Now that you have completed the self assessment questions, review the material in Module 2-Purpose and Value to confirm your answers. After reading the module, move on to the workbook learning activities, which will assist you in developing your skills.



Workbook learning activities



To help you review and apply the material covered in Module 2-Purpose and Value, a selection of review questions and/or activities is provided. Again, no answers are included. Use the material from the module, outside sources, and your colleagues to help you complete the activities and answer the questions. There may be more than one right answer. Use the questions and activities to generate discussion about the material. Be prepared to discuss, perform, or demonstrate your answers in class.

- 1) You witness a visitor damaging the resource by picking flowers from an endangered plant. Describe how you could interpretively manage the situation to educate her, protect the resource in the future, and allow the visitor to maintain her dignity?

- 2) Is there ever a time when an interpretive approach to controlling visitor behavior would not be the option of choice? Yes/No Explain your answer.

- 3) What do you think is the most important purpose of interpretation? Why?



Take it to your park



Answer each question with the information specific to your park. You will have to conduct some research in order to answer each question. Use them as a guide for beginning your career in California State Parks.

Purpose and Value

Park name _____

- 1) Generate a list or synopsis of the common formal interpretive programs provided in your park. Indicate which ones focus on educational messages.

1a) Of those that are educational in nature, what types of messages are the above programs primarily giving (natural resource based, cultural resource, or managerial)?



Take it to your park



1b) Which programs contain a resource protection or visitor safety message?