

Fall 1990
Interpreting Native American
Cultures

Interpretation



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Today is the first of November—All Saints Day—rather apropos. I sit at my desk gazing out the window, wishing that I could see as readily into the minds of our American Indian brothers and sisters, and understand how they perceive the world about us. In our rush to dominate the land, many of us have given little thought to the land as mother earth—nurturer, healer, restorer. We have either ignored the spiritual, or we have relegated it to certain days on a liturgical calendar, and then to the inside of certain buildings.

The fact that this issue of *Interpretation* deals with American Indian perceptions of place, time, and history is a hopeful sign that we have reached a point where “different” no longer equates to “inferior,” or to “wrong,” or to “threatening.” It is difficult to walk the same path of a fellow human being. If we succeed, it is nigh impossible to accurately relate the experience to others. So, I turn to Chief Seattle:

Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing, the humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of the red man....

We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is not his brother, but his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on. ...

What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, men would die from a great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts, soon happens to man. All things are connected.

You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandfathers. So that they will respect the land, tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the sons of the earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves.

This we know. The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected...Even the white man cannot be exempt from the common destiny. We may be brothers after all. We shall see.

What more can we say that is more thorough or eloquent than these words of Chief Seattle first spoken in the 1850s? Read the following articles, and if you have not begun your journey to a fuller, more accurate understanding of our Indian neighbors, the following pages may be the place to begin that journey.

Douglas L Caldwell
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Regional Information Survey

Alaska

In the enabling legislation of many new Alaskan parks and preserves, the words "protect and interpret" appear frequently. The NPS has been mandated to protect resources in the traditional sense and to also interpret, in cooperation with Native Alaskans, sites and lifeways associated with Native cultures. The interdisciplinary nature of positions in Alaska encourages cultural resources staff to work with the limited number of interpreters to produce interpretive media and programs.

During a major archeological project in a park, team members have prepared interpretive materials including exhibits, slide programs, articles for local publications and on-site programs for visitors and community residents. Interpretation of these cultural resource issues have provided a positive interface between the park service, native communities and park visitors.

Pacific Northwest

Two major Native American cultural events took place this summer.

At Whitman Mission, the 10th Annual Pow Wow was held featuring 75 members of the Confederated tribes on the Umatilla Indian Reservation. Whitman Mission staff are also working with the Confederated Tribes in the planning of a tribal heritage visitor center.

In August, Nez Perce Cultural Days involved members of the Nez Perce Tribe in speeches, dancing, drumming demonstrations, a horse parade, and craft concessions. This event which brings the Nez Perce community together with other communities was supported by a hundred volunteers and attended by 3,500 people.

Also of note, are the archeological survey and testing in North Cascades which began five years ago. This work under the leadership of Bob Mierendorf has yielded the discovery of 195 Indian sites spanning up to 7,600 years ago. The sites are truly significant in that they demonstrate Native American use of landscapes from the valley to the subalpine.

Midwest

In North America, Western Expansion meant constriction for the American Indian peoples. Historians often justified or minimized atrocities committed against Indians by referring to them as savages, barbarians, heathens, and drunkards. In recent decades, understanding and human respect is gradually replacing prejudice and bigotry. The Midwest cradles ancestral homes of prehistoric nations and lands occupied by the woodland and plains Indians. More and more park literature, interpretive exhibits, and activities reflect the Indian perspective as we search for an understanding in dealing with different cultures. The Chief Interpreter at Effigy Mounds performs and teaches Osage tribal dances as a window into a very special culture. In the Museum of Western Expansion a complete tipi is on daily view and interpreters respectfully discuss the plains Indian lifestyle with visitors from around the world. At Pipestone and Grand Portage, American Indians daily perform traditional crafts before visitors. Attitudes are slowly changing as non-Indians are learning from those who preceded us on this land.

Western

In the Western Region, researchers and American Indian people are working together to expand successful interpretive programs. Dynamic involvement of tribal members at Yosemite and Point Reyes weaves new life into the web of ecological patterns in the parks. Resource managers and visitors gain an opportunity to learn the reasons behind traditional life ways and land management techniques.

Positive concern and Indian involvement in the development of the park's planning process resulted in a rich harvest for the interpretive program at John Muir NHS. Park staff initiated contact with three tribal groups to learn more about traditional land use patterns in the new oak forest land acquisition. Two of the tribes have agreed to send dancers for public events. A phone call to the University of California produced a team of student researchers to conduct oral history interviews and search the ethnographic record. Tribal members are again participating in the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the park dedicated to one of America's first immigrant environmentalists.

Rocky Mountain

In the Rocky Mountain Region more than 60 percent of the parks in our region are involved in the interpretation of Native Americans. Some, like Golden Spike NHS, deal with more abstract concepts such as the transcontinental railroad's impacts on the American Indian. Others, such as Mesa Verde NP, interpret the lifeways of a prehistoric Indian people, lifeways which painstakingly have been reconstructed from the physical vestiges of that civilization.

At Knife River Indian Villages NHS, representatives of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Tribes are involved in planning the interpretive themes and exhibits for the park's new visitor center. Big Hole NB, Badlands NP, Mesa Verde NP, Bighorn Canyon NRA and other park areas employ Native Americans for frontline interpretation as well as behind the scenes work.

This past September, the US House of Representatives approved a bill, "To authorize the establishment of a memorial at Custer Battlefield National Monument to honor the Indians who fought in the Battle of the Little Bighorn...."

Southwest

CONTACT, the Southwest Regional interpreter's newsletter, has become a valuable way to share interpretive perspectives, techniques, sources, and news. A recent issue devoted to interpreting American Indian cultures brought a heavy response for additional copies. Feel free to call for copies.

The recently organized Council for American Indian Interpretation, originating within the Four Corners region, has approached the National Association for Interpretation to become a working group within the national organization. Provisional approval has been made, which will bring many opportunities to enhance American Indian interpretation, and offer affiliation of many American Indian institutions not previously affiliated with interpreters. The opportunities, we think, are tremendous. Region VII of the NAI has already committed itself to a 1992 regional workshop in northern New Mexico, devoted to American Indian and Hispanic interpretation.

Service Center Report

North Atlantic

Seventeen was the magic number this year! The North Atlantic Region's Interpretive Skills Team coordinated and presented seventeen training courses including a major conference on "Interpreting Critical Resource Issues" in partnership with several state and private agencies. Attended by more than eighty participants the conference dealt with resource topics and operational concerns critical to front line interpreters.

Other courses included one on "Interpreting with Museum Objects", two on "Interpretive Program Auditing Techniques," and three on "The Role of the Interpreter in Park Security." A special presentation on "Training Techniques" was held with Mather staff assistance as part of our annual meeting with other Regional skills teams. Workshops on site bulletins and public affairs as well as developing education programs rounded out the year.

The special achievement was that most were presented through park support without training funding.

Southeast

Over the past two years, the SERO Ranger Activities Division has emphasized the value of replacing interpretive media through the cyclic maintenance program. In FY91 the effort paid off with approved projects totaling \$299,000, pending appropriation action. An additional \$660,000 in cyclic funding was approved for both physical and programmatic access projects at a dozen parks.

In the last quarter, major interpretive planning efforts have been completed at Andersonville NHS and Fort Sumter NM. Currently, SERO staff will be working on a visitor use plan for Canaveral NS.

On October 12, Abraham Lincoln Birthplace NHS unveiled its newest exhibit, a cross-section of the famous Boundary Oak, a tree that supposedly stood as a sapling at the time of Lincoln's birth. Exhibit production, coordinated by SERO staff, was facilitated by using the in-house silk screening lab at Andersonville NHS. SERO plans to use the Andersonville lab to accomplish several similar projects in FY91.

Mid-Atlantic

Because Native Americans are interpreted very little in the area, the staff at Assateague Island National Seashore planned and laid out a wayside exhibit.

The exhibit details how the Indians used barrier island natural resources. The staff discovered in its planning how important it is to receive comments on draft exhibit text from the nearest Native American tribal organization. The Regional Office Native American/NPS Liaison provided a contact and, as a result, a very complimentary letter was received from a Native American Chief in Delaware.

Fort Necessity National Battlefield was fortunate to hire a Native American interpreter last summer with an in-depth knowledge of Eastern Woodlands Indians during the 18th century. He developed a living history program on the Indians during the French and Indian War, which both the public and staff enjoyed. The program helped interpret and important aspect of the War that is not usually emphasized.

National Capital

Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens has a new visitor center in a restored historic building. The excellent new exhibits were developed by the park and a private contractor using the Harpers Ferry Center indefinite quantity contract system. We in the Region are pleased to have this new tool available to us for acquiring exhibits. Manassas National Battlefield Park has a new look. More than 35 wayside exhibits have been installed this year to better explain troop movements and battlefield strategy. Large scale changes are evident at Harpers Ferry Park. Most buildings in the lower town are undergoing renovation and many will have new exhibits. A new visitor contact station there inaugurates the new visitor transportation system of six NPS busses. On your next visit to Harpers Ferry, stop in the lower town to see the increased interpretive opportunities available to visitors.

New faces in new interpretive jobs include Dennis Frye as Chief Interpreter at Harpers Ferry Park, George Vasjuta as Regional Interpretive Planner and Bill Gwaltney as Regional Interpretive Specialist.

Denver

The Denver Service Center recently completed a GMP/IP for El Malpais National Monument in northern New Mexico. Participation by four neighboring tribes was a critical element.

El Malpais NM includes land sacred to the Zuni, Acoma, Ramah Navaho, and Luguna. Legislation guarantees the tribes access and privacy for religious and subsistence purposes.

The planners hiked the area with tribal religious authorities to identify sacred sites. They then adjusted alternatives to separate public use from religious areas. The monument will be interpreted as a cultural landscape, seen through many perspectives. While maintaining accuracy, interpreters must be careful not to reveal esoteric information and sacred sites.

A committee including the NPS, BLM, and the tribes will monitor interpretive programs and potential land use conflicts, and provide a forum for cooperation.

Harpers Ferry

The HFC staff is attempting to be more conscious and sensitive to park audiences and neighbors in the planning and design of interpretive media. For example in developing a new visitor center at Knife River, special attention has been given to involving the three affiliated tribes (Mandan/Hadatsa/Arikaks) in the planning process. It is recognized that park's story is their story and that tribes will be a major audience to the site.

Recently, tribe and park representatives traveled to HFC to provide input into the exhibit concept. One reason this has been successful is that the need for consultation was identified early in the process, and funds were specifically programmed to enable the full participation of the tribe.

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Your Regional Cooperating Association Coordinator now has the generic Memorandum of Agreement between NPS and individual associations on disk. We have asked the regional coordinators to work with park coordinators and review the status of MOAs with each association in your area. Some clarification is in order regarding those agreements. MOAs are written for five years, and renew automatically for another five years. After that, the MOA between NPS and an Association must be renewed with new signatures by the Regional Director and the Chairman of the Board of the Association. ENP&MA and SPMA were renewed in 1990 (since they cross regional boundaries), but we suspect many of the other agreements are out of date. Please take a look at your agreements and take steps to renew them if they have expired.

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of having these basic agreements in place and current. MOAs are the documents which form the basis of our business relationship with each cooperating association. If you have any questions, please contact Diane Jung.

"Cooperating Associations Guideline, NPS-32" is being revised. Our goal is to have the new guideline completed by August of 1991. Any comments regarding the existing guideline should be addressed to your regional cooperating association coordinator.

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The Park Service will be offering a training course titled "Servicewide Workshop on The Interpretation of Cultural Resources" February 25 - March 1, 1991, at Lyndon B Johnson NHS. This is the course sponsored by the WASO History Division that traditionally has been referred to as the Historians' Workshop. In the past, this workshop was directed toward Regional Historians, concentrating on issues related to cultural resources management. This year, the WASO History and Interpretation Divisions are working together to broaden both the subject matter and the pool of participants. We hope to focus on issues related to the interpretation of history and cultural resources, and to select a class composed of 50% resource management staff and 50% interpretive staff. We are very excited about the opportunity this workshop offers to improve communication and information sharing between cultural resources management and interpretive staff, and hope that many of you will consider applying.

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The next time you attend a course at Mather you will notice a new look to the lobby and the coffee room. The primary addition is the Freeman Tilden exhibit focusing on Tilden, his contributions to interpretation, the Tilden Award, and recipients of the Award.

The new exhibit was made possible through a partnership consisting of the Interpretive Design Center, K C DenDooven, the National Parks and Conservation Association, and the Cooperating Association Fund Committee working with the staff at Mather. Everyone's contributions were instrumental in making this exhibit a reality.

The winter and spring will be busy at the Center with a diverse offering of interpretive training. "Developing NPS Educational Programs," January 23—February 1, is a new course that will address ways to work with local schools in developing curriculum-based interpretive programs. Other offerings include: "Interpretive Skills IV," February 25-March 8; "Interpretive Operations for First-Line Supervisors," March 11-22; "Historic Weapons Firing Certification," April 8-19; and "Library Management," April 30-May 3. You can begin looking for the Employee Development Opportunity Announcements approximately three months before the scheduled course dates.