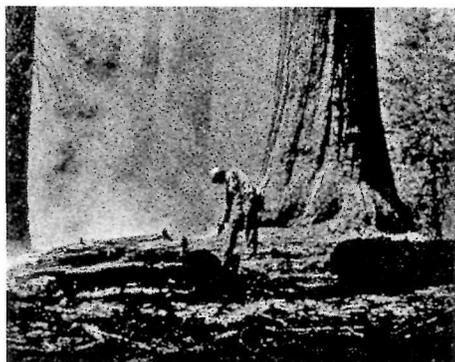


Spring 1989
Fire Interpretation

Interpretation



March 29, 1989

At times, the fires of 1988 already seem distant. It's been nearly six months since the evening news featured a never-ending stream of flame, fury, and destruction. Tonight's news featured the big oil spill in Alaska.irate fishermen angrily confront an Exxon oil spokesman wanting to know "Why didn't you do something sooner?" "Who's going to compensate us for our losses?" "How long have you had this 'let-flow policy'?"

Yellowstone interpreters, Harper's Ferry staff, and NPS employees everywhere have been dealing with the reality of 1988's fires throughout the winter, but the jury is still out on whether our natural fire policy, will fully recover. Like Exxon, it's apparent we have a major public relations problem.

Larger questions loom. The fires' side effects include an examination of our entire natural regulation management philosophy. Feed the elk, inoculate the bison, reseed the forests ... the serious implications of these debates are obvious. More than one "blue-ribbon" panel has called for a major public education effort to help people understand not only the principles behind our natural fire policy, but, by extension, some basic ecology as well.

This issue of *Interpretation* focuses on interpreting natural fire and its influence on landscapes, vegetation, and wildlife. Here you'll find approaches used in several parks, each with different fire ecologies. Other articles discuss the interpretation of natural fire from a more philosophical standpoint. Conrad Smith, assistant professor of journalism at Ohio State University, shares some thoughts on how the media reported the Yellowstone fires. And there are articles dealing with what happened in Yellowstone and what plans exist for telling the fires' story to the public. These are complex topics that require all our creative energy and skill as interpreters.

The stakes are high. Public perceptions of how Yellowstone is managed influence how we do business everywhere in the Park Service. We need to tell the story behind Yellowstone's fires—and we need to tell it well.

Contributors:

Robert Barbee
Gene Cox
Joe Decker
Jack de Golia
Peggy Dolinich
Gregg Fauth
Sue Husari
Bruce M Kilgore
Sylvia Nichols
Linda Olson
George Robinson
Paul Schullery
Carol Shively
Conrad Smith
Joe Zarki

Joseph M. Zarki

Joe Zarki
Park Ranger
Yellowstone National Park

Regional Information Survey

Alaska

Our loss of Jim Shives, Interpretive Specialist, Alaska Regional Office, as a close friend and worker was a severe blow to us. We have started a memorial fund for Jim through the Alaska Natural History Association. Contributions may be made to ANHA at 605 W. 4th Ave., Suite 120, Anchorage, Alaska 99501.

Teresa Shirakawa will be the Interpretive Specialist in the Alaska Region. We look forward to benefitting from her considerable skills.

Other changes include Karla Zervos, Manager at the Alaska Public Land Information Center, Fairbanks, replacing Deanne Adams; Karen Gustin, the first interpretive specialist at Kenai Fjords National Park; and a soon to be selected interpretive specialist at Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve to assist Chief Park Naturalist Bruce Paige. These new positions are significant operational gains for Alaska. We need many more.

Pacific Northwest

Sometime in the future, perhaps, we will have appropriations for FTEs, meantime the need to manage our workloads means more volunteers. WASO has initiated an excellent training program for volunteer coordinators and managers systemwide which will help us to acquire those willing to offer assistance to the NPS. In April, Volunteer Program Management Training was provided jointly to the Pacific Northwest and Alaska Regions. Thirty participants received the program management expertise and are busy trying out some of the new ideas that generated from the workshop.

Olympic has a new nature trail at Sol Duc and a new interpretive kiosk was built to include exhibits. North Cascades is involved in a joint venture with the United States Forest Service in the operation of a native plant greenhouse.

Midwest

Only 11 wolves were discovered in the recent 7-week census conducted at Isle Royale National Park, an island wilderness in Lake Superior. The bad news: the census confirmed that this was the fifth year in a row that the Island's wolves have dwindled. The good news: one of the 11 animals was a pup. If more pups are born this spring—and survive the summer—the park's endangered wolf population may yet survive. This project, in its 30th year, is one of the world's longest running predator studies.

The Biodiversity Curriculum project is nearing completion. Parks will receive at least one copy of the final book for use in their environmental education programs.

Western

Special events and special programs are ways to communicate park messages and missions. Many special interpretive activities have occurred and are being planned in the region.

Pu'uhonua O Honaunau NHP and Hawaii Volcanoes NP celebrated the richness of Hawaiian culture through a variety of events; Cabrillo NM held a special symposium on the biological and cultural effects that the coming of the European had on the Americas; and Golden Gate NRA is interpreting biological diversity through a number of special efforts and activities.

Lava Beds NM is moving forward with plans for a historical conference on the CCC; Yosemite and Sequoia/Kings Canyon NPs have centennial anniversaries upcoming; USS Arizona Memorial 50th anniversary commemoration planning continues; and a multi-national conference on Pacific protected areas at War in the Pacific is in its preliminary stages.

Lynne Nakata is going to the Federal maximum security prison in Marion, Illinois to participate in a cooperative exhibit planning venture with the US Bureau of Prisons and NPS's Alcatraz.

Rocky Mountain

"No good deed goes unpunished!" Ever heard that? Encourage folks to participate in their own professional organization, the National Association of Interpretation, and you're a proselyte on behalf of a "special interest group." But, aren't interpreters especially interested in their profession as well as their agency? Duncan Rollo and Debbie Tewell facilitated an excellent NAI regional workshop in Grand Junction in March. Six NPS rangers made presentations, one of whom was former Director Mott! Only seven other full-time NPS employees attended, out of a total attendance of 120. A frustrated ranger said, "Where are we? NPS is not the only outfit doing interpretation; we should be learning from the excellence being displayed by others!" Amen.

Southwest

In response to the increasing Hispanic population in the United States and the increasing relationships between the United States and Mexico, Regional Director John Cook has designated eleven parks as bilingual sites. This applies to interpretive media, bilingual personal services, and public affairs. This, of course, means both a commitment and a strategy - a total shift in thinking about what to communicate, who to communicate to, and how to do it.

The visitation percentages of Spanish speaking and reading peoples to the designated parks is irrelevant. What is relevant are the profound changes underway in both the United States and Mexico. The parks and monuments must have the skills and sensitivity to accommodate to those changes, and be able to serve the citizens of both nations, who share such an enormous common border and common heritage, with all the courtesy, respect, and capability they deserve.

Service Center Report

North Atlantic

The North Atlantic Regional Office, Division of Interpretation, offers a Publishing Service to parks in the Region. The heart of the Publishing Service is a Wang 280, Hewlett-Packard ScanJet scanner and LaserJet Series II laser printer.

Software packages used on the Publishing System include WordPerfect 5.0, Micrografx Designer and Graph Plus, Scangal and Page-Maker. The Publishing Service has been available since November, 1988. Since then we've improved "The Interpreter's Window," produced a new map for Adams, an 8" X 10" laminated program announcer for NARO EEO, and an 8" X 10" invitation Longfellow NHS used to announce their park's anniversary celebration. Other projects include brochures and handbooks.

We hope to upgrade to a Postscript printing language so that artwork can be scaled.

Mid-Atlantic

NPS costumed interpretation served as excellent public relations devices for two Mid-Atlantic parks. At an "Explore Family Reunion," costumed personnel and volunteers of Booker T. Washington NM, demonstrated crafts. A tame rooster and a pet lamb were also available for visitor enjoyment. Enthusiastic publicity encourages park participation in the 1989 "Reunion."

In commemoration of Hopewell Furnace's 50th anniversary, costumed interpreters portrayed "Tom Foster" and "George Kephart" who lived and worked during the Hopewell era. The presentations resulted in numerous requests for "Tom and George" for off-site programs at local civic, educational and social organizations.

A special Liberty Bell study, written and updated by Park Service historians, was distributed to staff and volunteers at Independence NHP. The summary separates fact from legend about the Bell.

Denver

A visitor center is a public building, and at least one of the main objectives of a successful building is to provide adequately a service to the public. Many visitor centers are too often planned for the desires of the planner and convenience of the operating personnel and not for the comfort and convenience of the visitors. These structures, empty of visitors, may work admirably for Park Service operations. Do they, on the other hand, fully consider the mental comfort and physical convenience of the visitor? Essentially, and in most instances, our visitors are transient. A visitor center is but a stopping place, and in the visitors mind it becomes basically a source of information and orientation regardless of the subject matter.

Our visitors are in an unfamiliar setting. The first thing a person wants in an unfamiliar situation is warmth and friendliness and freedom from decision. That should be a primary concern of the planner. Interpretive content, architectural ambience and all the other considerations are important but only after the primary concern is met.

Southeast

In a commitment to furthering the *Interpretive Challenge* and its implementation strategies, the Southeast Region was relatively successful in 1988 in improving its interpretive efforts through use of available "enhancement funds." Approximately \$2 million in enhancement funding were available, and thirty percent (\$580,000) was devoted to interpretation and enhancing interpretive programs in units of the Southeast region. The funding went for upgrading/adding museum and wayside exhibits, extending hours of operation at attended stations, increasing conducted tours, and improving special populations accessibility. In FY 1989, an effort is being made through Statements for Interpretation to identify additional priority interpretive needs. The expectation is that available funding (park bases, cyclic funds, cooperating association funds, etc.) can be devoted to meeting such needs to improve interpretive programs in parks.

National Capital

Thirty five NCR interpreters gathered in March for a Chief Interpreters workshop. Our task was to continue "Building Quality Interpretive Services" teambuilding to improve services within limited budgets.

The nominal group process yielded priorities for enhancing visitor services: improve program quality, recruit quality people, provide better training, improve and expand auditing, and offer affordable housing to lower-graded employees.

Other sessions looked at customer services in the private sector, resource management, evaluating and auditing programs, biodiversity, the effect of tropical deforestation on migratory birds, and the geology of the Potomac Basin.

Harpers Ferry

Prior to last summer, a quarter of a millennium elapsed since the last major fire at Yellowstone. This time around, the NPS was poised to interpret the event.

Anticipating growing public interest, the park staff teamed up with HFC to develop a temporary exhibit, A/V programs, and a new folder that will be in place this summer.

They focus on the important role of fire as a natural and beneficial process. A major objective is to counter misconceptions about the extent of devastation as popularized by the media.

The fire was pure serendipity for interpretation. It provided a dramatic backdrop to the story of fire ecology and provided unprecedented interest in resource management issues. The most challenging aspect was envisioning how the park will appear in the coming seasons. Stop by Grant Village to see how we did!

Robert Huggins
Interpretive Specialist
Division of Interpretation, WASO
202-523-5270

BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Servicewide Interpretive Initiative of the National Park Service

Have you seen...?

- The Servicewide Biological Diversity Interpretive Initiative memorandum from former Director Mott dated September 13, 1988, officially announcing the initiative's start in FY-1989, and that it "...will continue as an important interpretive program indefinitely".
- "Interpreting Biological Diversity in the National Park System," the NPS Interpretive Initiative Plan prepared by the Biological Diversity Interpretive Initiative Task Group, dated April, 1988. This plan includes goals and objectives, the program action plan and a priority listing of field support projects.
- The Poster, "Biodiversity...it makes all the difference in the world" from Midwest Region. Two copies of the poster were mailed in November, 1988, to every Park Chief of Interpretation in the System. The poster is part of the biological diversity curriculum materials being developed by Midwest Region.
- Interpreting Biological Diversity: A Handbook for National Park Service Communicators was sent to all permanent NPS Interpreters in June, 1989. As a cooperative effort of the NPS and the School of Natural Resources at The Ohio State University, this loose-leaf manual contains summaries of several NPS related biodiversity reports, fact sheets, sample interpretive programs from NPS parks and informational papers.

Coming attractions include...

- A Directory of Biological Diversity Materials for Interpreters and Educators is being compiled by The Ohio State University and will include sources for reference, audiovisual and curriculum materials. The target date for completion is: Summer, 1989.
- A Servicewide Generic Slide and Videotape Program is being prepared by Interpreting Biological Diversity Task Group members Carol Spears of Cuyahoga Valley NRA and The Ohio State University. This program will address the major issues of biodiversity as they relate to national parks and can be used for training and for public viewing. The target date for completion is: Late Summer, 1989.
- A Biological Diversity Folder is being developed by Harpers Ferry Center which will describe biodiversity in the National Park System for visitors and park employees. The target date for completion is: Late Summer, 1989.
- A Smithsonian traveling exhibit on biological diversity, entitled "Diversity Endangered", is available from the Harpers Ferry Center. Additional exhibits may be available from your Regional Chief of Interpretation. In addition a sixteenth panel for the exhibit is planned to depict the NPS role in protecting biodiversity. The target date for completion of the NPS panel is: Late Summer, 1989.
- A plan for a slide repository is being developed in cooperation with North Carolina State University to provide a clearinghouse for color slides. A pilot module for the Southern and Central Appalachian region, scheduled to be completed by Fall of 1989, will provide the basis of the plan's recommendations for developing a Servicewide slide repository.
- In Midwest Region, Ten Environmental Education Units on Biodiversity Topics are being developed by the Minnesota Environmental Education Board for Voyageurs, Indiana Dunes, and Pipestone. The material will be designed to be used Servicewide. The curriculum units include pre and post site/classroom, as well as park activities. Fourth through sixth grade students are the target audience. All ten units are scheduled to be completed by Late Summer of 1989.
- In the North Atlantic Region, the Servicewide project on "Inventory and Conservation of Genetic Resources in the form of Historically Significant Fruit Trees in the National Park System" sent a questionnaire to 341 NPS sites to identify locations of historic plantings of fruit and nut trees; assess possible ages of those plantings; and identify sources of expertise about, and cultivars of, historic varieties. Later phases of the project will add information regarding management needs. Interim products will be distributed as they become available.