interpretation

A REPORT

ON

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

INTERPRETATION

BY

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INTRODUCTION

The current uneasy feeling of many National Park Service people about the status of interpretation was probably best expressed in the rhetorical question addressed to the powers that be during the course of this study, by a Grand Teton seasonal. "Is interpretation really going downhill - or is it merely standing still while the rest of the world goes up?"

Concern for the vitality of interpretation has been evident throughout the Service for some time. It was a topic of extended discussion in several recent meetings of the field and Washington directorate. Following its review of NPS field operations, in 1971, the Advisory Board reported to Secretary of the Interior Rogers Morton on the status of NPS interpretation: "We must conclude generally, however, that interpretive positions, facilities and performance are at a low point for recent decades. On a piecemeal basis interpretation appears to have suffered most in the competition between programs for inadequate budgets and from personnel restrictions of recent years."

The present study was initiated at the request of the Director on July 10, 1972, when he notified the regional directors he was asking me to accept a six month assignment to undertake a review of NPS interpretation.

In deciding how the job might best be approached, it seemed to me what was not needed was another task force making one more survey of field interpretation. The people who are actually involved with field interpretation matters, most of whom are in the parks, already know better than anyone else what the problems really are. My objective has been to find a way to let the people of the National Park Service develop the report. I have therefore involved as many people as possible, solicited their views, and to the degree possible have attempted, objectively, to translate their knowledge and experience into a final report.

The study has benefitted enormously from the counsel and direction received from two advisory groups. Pete Shedd, Deputy Director of the Virginia State Office, Tommy Gilbert, Chief of the Office of Environmental Interpretation, and Tommy Thomas, Supervisor of the Mather Training Center, formed a steering committee which did most of the strategic planning. The regional directors appointed the following personal representatives to carry out the study operations in their respective regions: Northeast, Frank Barnes; Southeast, Bernie Goodman (Kennesaw Mountain); Midwest, Jim Schaack; Southwest, Al Shroeder; Western, John Good (Yosemite); Pacific Northwest, John Davis (Klamath Group); NCP, Rock Comstock and Wes Wolfe.

At a meeting of both groups in Catoctin in September, a Questionnaire (actually six separate Questionnaires) was developed for superintendents, permanent interpreters, seasonal interpreters, regional office, management and professional (Washington Office, DSC, HFC, and Training Centers), and concessioners. The regional representatives accepted the sizable task of distribution and tabulation. Some 1,400 Questionnaires were distributed, with just under 1,000 returned.

One purpose of the Questionnaire was to identify the problem areas of interpretation. At the second general meeting, held in Yosemite in November, the major areas of concern were defined and proposals to help correct the problems were agreed upon.

By reason of a timely invitation from Larry Zollar, a participant at the Yosemite meeting, an interpretive training course scheduled for January at the Albright Training Center was replaced by a session whose purpose was to involve a wide variety of people in formulation of basic recommendations. Specifically, the session was not to be restricted to interpreters. Of the 50-odd invited participants, a minority were interpreters at the field and regional level; one-fourth were superintendents and state directors, and there was substantial representation from park concessioners, from other Federal and state agencies and from the Canadian Park Service.

The group was divided into five work teams under Bob Barrel, State Director, Hawaii; Bill Brown, Southwest Region; Dave Dame, Superintendent, Manhattan; Gary Everhardt, Superintendent, Grand Teton; and Jim Tobin, Superintendent, Mount Rainier. At the windup of the meeting the five teams presented their conclusion and recommendations on the five topics which constitute the section headings of this report. Serving as convincing evidence that there is a concensus within the National Park Service on the status of interpretation, the reports of the five teams were almost identical.

The report reflects the concensus reached at Grand Canyon, which in turn reflects the generally consistent conclusions of the Questionnaire and the many contributions submitted independently. The report, however, is not intended to be encyclopedic, there are gaps in the coverage, and a conscious effort was made not to present an interminably long list of Things That Should Be Done. The report simply attempts to answer two questions: "What are the problems?" "What can be done?"

There are several things the report does not try to do, such as recounting the past glories of interpretation and what those achievements have meant to the cause of national parks. All of this is a matter of record. Nor is there an effort to devise a new definition for interpretation. I suspect the teachings of Freeman Tilden will outlive all those now practicing the art which he furthered.

Hopefully the report is not guilty of ignoring the good things accomplished by interpretation in recent years, while seeking out everything that seems to have gone wrong. First of all, the past decade has witnessed probably the most distinguished advances in the history of interpretation. Secondly, interpreters in my experience tend as a group to be highly critical. Although observing that "we currently are experiencing a definite low ebb in attitudes within interpretation," Jim Schaack of the Midwest Region concludes, "it is a reflection of the high goals established in the field of interpretation and the intense striving by many to improve on past standards."

I have tried to keep in mind that every problem is actually part of a larger problem, that it cannot be successfully treated when it is totally removed from the larger problems of which it is a part. Interpretation is but one of several major operational activities of the National Park Service. Interpretation must be examined in relationship to these other program areas, all of which have been severely affected by ever more inhibiting personnel and budget constraints, a primary factor in the present status of interpretation.

Perhaps the clearest evidence of the resiliency and inherent commitment of those engaged in interpretation has been the outpouring of suggestions and recommendations during the course of the study. I received more than 300 pages (of single-spaced typing) from more than 100 persons, analyzing the problems, submitting their ideas for solution. To all of these people, to the 1,000 persons who participated in the Questionnaire, and to the steering committee members and the regional representatives, I express my gratitude. This report, which essentially is a report by the National Park Service, is hereby submitted to the Director of the National Park Service for his consideration.

ONE

THE MISSION

Interpretation has one role: to support the mission of the National Park Service. One of the participants in the Grand Canyon meeting, the Director of the Arkansas State Park System, defined the relationship of interpretation to the ultimate value of parks:

> "Our park systems throughout the country must become positive reactions to problems that face our country. We must interpret our parks as <u>they</u> relate to our society. Interpretation cannot be left in the park. It cannot be confined to park boundaries and it cannot be confined to nature or history. The role of interpretation should be as a tool in accomplishing the mission of the National Park Service."

As this study of interpretation was being carried out, during the Centennial Year of 1972, the traditional mission of the National Park Service was being questioned and redefined. The National Parks Centennial Commission engaged the Conservation Foundation to involve a cross section of the general public in preparing a plan to guide the National Park Service through a second century. The report, presented at the Second World Conference on National Parks, recommended many changes, some revolutionary, some incremental.

Several of the technical sessions of the Conference, which dealt with interpretation, suggested that the traditional role of interpretation should be reconsidered. Delegates from the 83 nations were not primarily interested in the refinements in interpretive techniques which are taking place. They were, however, greatly concerned with the purpose of interpretation and there was widespread agreement, particularly among the developing countries, that the greatest contribution which can be made by interpretation is to support national programs of conservation education. Many delegates spoke to the argument that only if people understand and support the idea of environmental quality will there be a healthy future for national parks.

In his paper entitled "Upgrading Park Interpretation and Communication With The Public," the delegate from Scotland suggested that a new definition of interpretation might be in order to express the much broader concern. His definition, in fact, does not mention national parks:

> "Interpretation is the art of explaining the place of man in his environment, to increase visitor or public awareness of the importance of this relationship, and to awaken a desire to contribute to environmental conservation."

There is uncertainty within NPS today as to the mission of interpretation. What indeed is environmental interpretation, and how does one apply it to historical areas; in what way can interpretive programs be made relevant; is the purpose of interpretation to fight environmental degradation or to convey the park theme: these are the questions which surfaced repeatedly during the study.

> "Any organization is characterized not so much by what guidelines it puts out or memorandums sent or by how-to-do-it handbooks," observes one superintendent. "It is characterized by what its members perceive to be the mission of the organization. The organization's leaders must continually try to communicate the organization's mission and fine-tune it to meet the issues of the day or the trends they detect or foresee and the objectives they hope to reach."

Despite some current uncertainties about national park policy, particularly with respect to what the National Park System should consist of and what should be its basic priorities, some assumptions can be made:

That means will be found to prevent damage to park or resources by the development of facilities or programs;

That means will be found to prevent impairment of the park experience by congestion and over use;

That actions taken to insure these conditions will change the methods of access to the parks, particularly with respect to the use of the automobile;

That the general public will develop an increasing awareness and understanding - and concern - for environmental problems;

That the greatest contribution which NPS can make to the park visitor is to stimulate appreciation and understanding through interpretation.

If the above premise is valid, submits the Chief, Long Range Planning, "then the problem is in defining and providing for use. Programs that permit the visitor to understand his options for legitimate use of the parks and the proper mode of use is where our future lies."

But it is not a simple thing to translate these assumptions into interpretive guidelines. The mission of interpretation must be addressed in something more than abstractions. As one superintendent observes:

> "Abstract objectives such as 'to communicate the significance of the American heritage,' or 'to utilize meaningful environmental awareness themes,' make the interpreter sound very impressive but we do not know how to change what our field interpreters say, or do, in order to achieve these objectives."

Yet there is equally forceful opposition to the establishment of stereotyped guidelines whose affect is to homogenize all park interpretation. One of the conclusions from the Grand Canyon meeting was that "Each park is unique and therefore cannot be handled by a general formula from on high."

In an era of environmental concern, NPS must more clearly define its responsibility with respect to the national effort to improve the quality of the environment. Education is a synonym for interpretation, but to what degree should interpretation address itself, for example, to programs of resource utilization which may directly, or indirectly, threaten the integrity of national parks?

Understandably there are widespread differences of opinion as to the appropriate NPS role in this sensitive area. There is agreement that a public agency, such as NPS, should not develop its programs of public service without respect for and a knowledge of the social and environmental problems faced by the people who visit the parks (or by those unable to visit national parks). NPS can be a social force with a constructive social message. But there is general agreement that the agency established to administer the national parks has not been given the mandate to become a pleader for social change.

Probably the best guideline came from one of the Grand Canyon teams:

> "Interpretation cannot and should not be expected to confront and solve major social and environmental problems head on. It can help to gradually reduce and control those problems. In a democratic society the public must first be conditioned so that people want what is good for all. It cannot be forced down their throats. We must explicitly relate our areas, as examples and catalysts, to the social-and-natural process problems of our nation and of mankind in general - always deriving that relationship from the park itself (its management and its story). Therein lies the role of interpretation."

The other major area of uncertainty today, and one closely related to the area of environmental action, is the relationship, philosophically and organizationally, between environmental education and interpretation. Environmental education became a major NPS program, initially separated from the program areas of interpretation, with two goals: to establish a working relationship with school systems; and to help people understand and relate to their total environment. The need for integration of environmental education and interpretation is implicit in the role statement prepared by the Office of Environmental Interpretation.

> "Environmental education in the National Park System differs from interpretation only in that different audiences and approaches are used in creating teaching/learning experiences. The activity offers park resources to education communities as bases for environmental study. The effort thus remains firmly rooted in traditional interpretation."

Because interpretation can be almost limitless, its scope and direction must be in conformity with the mission of the National Park Service. The following guidelines summarize what most people believe to be the basic elements of the interpretive mission. Essentially, all relate to the primary purpose of interpretive services: engendering a love and respect and knowledge of those special places of natural beauty and historical significance which have been set aside in the National Park System. As with most great activities of mankind, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Perception as the highest form of park use. All interpretive programs should seek to enhance the experience of the visitor. The abiding purpose of national parks is to bring man and his natural and cultural environment into closer harmony. Interpretive programs should be designed to help people perceive and treasure the natural and historic processes through which the land and all living things have achieved their existence. Perception, then, should become the highest form of park use.

Preservation through appreciation. Interpretation can become the most effective device for preserving park values. One superintendent declared: "Interpretation is the frontal attack which through proper use can ease law enforcement problems, get across safety, and aid the maintenance and littering problems." Visitors who are informed about the reason for park policies and who understand the threats to survival of the parks are more likely to become personally involved and to help in preservation efforts.

Realization of the educational potential of national parks. The Conservation Foundation Task Force on "The National Park System as an Educational and Cultural Institution" concluded "The National Park Service does not have to become an educational and cultural institution; it already is one. The Park Service boasts the nation's, if not the world's, largest, most generously endowed campus without walls." Such programs as the Yosemite Institute and the Rocky Mountain Summer Seminars provide models for utilization of national parks by educational institutions for programs of instruction from the elementary grades to the college level. In a time of intense pressure from enormous numbers of visitors, interpretation must also provide some in-depth programs. Parks are self-revealing, educative environments where park values can be understood by the visitor in a context which relates them to his own life and values.

Support of the environmental movement. In the not too distant past, interpretation was an activity which added much to the visitor's appreciation and understanding of national parks. Now the stage has been expanded. Interpretation is coming to be an activity which will add much to the visitor's appreciation and understanding of his world. "That drum surely has been beating loudly and clearly: parks today - a social force for an environmental ethic, and our interpretive programs at the hub of that force."

Outreach through environmental education. A participant in the Grand Canyon meeting, Bill Eddy, who directed production of the film "Earthbound" and the book Consider the Process of Living, described the role of environmental education programs such as NEED, STEP, and the Environmental Study Areas, all of which involve young people through the school systems:

> "These represent a specific and detailed involvement by the Park Service primarily in the public educational system throughout this country. Environmental education as defined in this context is not to be viewed as a substitute for, but rather as an extension of the interpretive program within each park. Its prime purpose is to amplify in national and even global terms a concern, with sensitivity to surroundings, similar to that expressed by local park interpretive programs. However, the particular role of environmental education within the whole of the national parks interpretive mission is to utilize existing school systems, social organizations and appropriate park areas to create a greater sensitivity to all natural processes and a greater awareness of them as a living organism."

Relevance to the interests and traditions of all visitors. The United States is a pluralistic nation; interpretive programs, particularly in historical areas, need to communicate this rich cultural diversity. As NPS is the steward of America's natural resources, it must also be the fair-minded steward, and the interpreter, of the cultural contributions made by the Indian, the black, and the Chicano, as well as the European.

Communication with young people. Presently, many young visitors are turned off by traditional terms of NPS interpretation. Yet both NPS and young people share many of the same goals: an interest in the future welfare of the parks, a sensitivity to natural and social values, a concern for environmental degradation. Interpretation should seek to build an alliance between NPS and young people through better means of communication. Programs which involve the visitor as a participant, rather than as a spectator, are generally more successful.

Parks as examples of environmental integrity. Interpretation is a vital way of dealing with parks themselves, as well as of dealing with visitors. The parks must be managed and developed in a way that will complement, rather than contradict, the interpretive theme of environmental quality. NPS is on stage, front and center; it must practice what it preaches.

Quality, the distinctive feature. There are many land-managing organizations that offer interpretive programs, just as there are many outstanding natural, historical and recreational sites administered by other Federal, state and private agencies. One characteristic that should always identify NPS administration is that any facility put in a park and any program developed for a park should be distinctive for its quality. Whatever the medium and whatever the goal of an interpretive program, it should be a quality performance. People have a right to be touched, to be moved, to be inspired by their visit to a national park. There is as much reason to restrict the number of people participating in an interpretive program, in order to preserve the quality of the program, as there is to restrict the number of people entering a national park, in order to preserve the quality of the park experience.

Above all, diversity. National parks are set aside because of their diversity. One of the great values of a national park is its ability to offer a contrast to the environment in which most park visitors live. The strength of the environmental message is that all park ecosystems are interrelated and often interdependent. But this does not mean that all park interpretation should take on a sameness. People do not travel all the way from Florida to Mt. Rainier to hear a lecture on water pollution. A park interpretive program must begin with, or return to, the basic park theme.

TWO

EMPHASIS AND PRIORITIES

Surveying the accomplishments of NPS interpretation during the past decade, one could only conclude that this period is one of remarkable advances, a period probably unmatched in NPS history. It is because of achievements such as those listed below that park administrators of other nations look to the U.S. National Park Service for leadership and guidance. A recent British participant in the Sixth International Seminar on the Administration of National Parks, held in the United States and Canada, in submitting his official report upon his field observations, spoke for the world park movement when he said, "It is of course for the promotion of interpretive techniques that the American park service is justly renowned."

Mather Training Center

In 1963 restoration of the former Storer College buildings at Harpers Ferry was completed and the Stephen T. Mather Training Center began operations. Just previously, the Horace M. Albright Training Center had moved from its temporary location in Yosemite into newly constructed quarters at Grand Canyon. These two modern facilities are evidence of the exceptional NPS commitment to employee training. The Mather Center in particular emphasizes the importance of interpretation, for it was established as an interpretive training center. Later the curriculum was expanded to include courses covering most NPS activities, but interpretation has always been the primary theme of the Mather Center. In 1972, the establishment of a working agreement with George Williams College to provide interpretive training and graduate school assignments for NPS interpreters further enhanced the NPS interpretive training program. An agreement, also in 1972, with the Yosemite Institute to provide highly specialized training provides still another opportunity for NPS interpreters.

Environmental Education

In part responding to the national concern for environmental quality, NPS in 1968 launched the environmental education program. NEED, the Environmental Study Areas, the National Environmental Education Landmarks have achieved national recognition and together these programs have substantially contributed to the environmental education movement throughout the country. The Environmental Study Area program is a cooperative venture of NPS, the Office of Education of HEW and local school systems. NPS environmental education specialists have directed or helped support a wide variety of environmental action programs.

Harpers Ferry Center

In 1970, with the completion of the Interpretive Design Center structure, the then scattered elements which produce the publication, audiovisual and museum programs of NPS were consolidated at Harpers Ferry. Complementing the Mather Training Center, and administering Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, the Harpers Ferry Center constitutes another major milestone in the history of NPS interpretation. Essentially a specialized service center, its products have received high recognition. In April, 1973, the First Federal Design Assembly will be convened in Washington, the response of President Richard Nixon's message last year to all government agencies ordering a program to improve the quality of Federal design. Among the too few evidences of quality design among Federal agencies the Design Assembly offers the works of the Harpers Ferry Center and Dulles Airport.

Living History

NPS in recent years has stressed the need to make history come alive. As a result, almost every historical park has introduced living history programs. Colorful, dramatic, often exciting, utilizing demonstrations and interpreters garbed in period dress, living history programs can now be found throughout the National Park Service - and not restricted to historical parks. These innovative approaches have greated enhanced visitor appreciation and substantially improved the quality of NPS interpretation.

Cooperating Associations

The essential role of the cooperating associations too seldomly receives official recognition. The scope of the assistance which the parks have received has steadily increased, particularly in the area of publications and the funding of innovative programs. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the success of living history has been largely due to the funding made available by cooperating associations, for the hiring of demonstrators and for purchase of costumes and equipment, when NPS funding was not available.

Urban Interpretation

Beginning with the Summer-in-the-Parks program of the National Capital Region, a new concept of urban park responsibility to the local community was launched in the urban parks of NPS. In a sense, these programs have made the urban parks come alive as a meaningful part of the daily lives of city residents, as well as park visitors. Richmond, New York and St. Louis are among the urban areas with outstanding programs.

VIP

Legislation to permit NPS to repay uniform, transportation and per diem expenses of volunteers wishing to contribute their skills without recompense has provided an impressive corps of talented individuals who have substantially supported the operations of the parks. The only weakness has been the legislative ceiling of $100,000 which restricts the number of volunteers.

In the face of these substantial gains, the conclusion of the Advisory Board that interpretation is at a "low point" in recent decades might seem surprising. But this is the prevailing view throughout the Service. Asked in the Questionnaire whether in the past several years there has been "a decline of interpretation in the National Park Service insofar as importance and professionalism is concerned," NPS employees by a vote of 593-333 agreed.

A Crisis in the Ranks of the Interpreters

Although the past decade has been a time of innovative program development, particularly in the field of interpretation, it has also been a time of intensifying crisis for the organization. The situation is well known, and the facts need only a brief summary. Each year from five to ten parks were added to the System, and each year the number of park visitors increased. But the period was also one of consistently tighter personnel ceilings and reduced budgets. Somehow, the new parks had to be staffed and funded; somehow facilities and services had to be provided for the increasing numbers of park visitors.

For an organization in this kind of predicament, there is a traditional relief route: to attempt to find a more efficient way to use the available manpower. In many cases this results in consolidation of several units, which have somewhat similar responsibilities, into a single administration, eliminating individual unit supervisors, placing all activities under a single chief, and all concerned henceforth participating in a broader range of responsibilities. Some positions can therefore be eliminated, and specialists give way to generalists. For NPS the solution was I&RM and the technician programs.

Although their total impact and effectiveness is controversial, these programs require no extensive description. I&RM (Interpretation and Resource Management) is a park organizational structure not previously used in the larger parks, although in concept a more traditional one for small parks. Where medium sized and larger parks previously had both an interpretive division and a protection/resources management division, these were replaced by a single division, headed by a Chief of Interpretation and Resource Management. In truth, I&RM was initially introduced as an experiment, not regarded as an organizational improvement, but because of staff shortages and a lack of more attractive alternatives it persisted and eventually (and bureaucratically) became entrenched. However, in the past few years, the trend has been away from the I&RM organization.

FOST was more the result of a comprehensive study effort. It had several objectives, a primary one being to remove the non-professional activities from the duties of both the interpreters and the (then) rangers, establishing a professional park management series encompassing both interpreters and rangers, both of whom were henceforth classified, and called, rangers. The non-professional duties, in protection, resource management and interpretation, were to be carried out by park aids and technicians. In the larger parks the FOST concept had significant implications for organization and management, districts being headed by park managers responsible for maintenance,

protection, resource management and interpretation. For the chief park interpreter this meant a significant change in his responsibilities. Where formerly he had line supervision over the district interpreters and was charged with direct responsibility for the park interpretive program, he now relinquished these responsibilities to the district manager and served as staff advisor to the superintendent.

There were considerably more rangers than interpreters, and no doubt many rangers were more experienced managers; as a result chiefs of I&RM and district managers were seldom interpreters, and interpretation became the responsibility, in many parks, of people without previous training or experience in interpretive work.

Two criticisms were levelled at these new organizational concepts from the beginning: that they tended to place interpretation in the hands of non-interpreters; that most of the positions "saved" - or more precisely, eliminated - were interpretive positions.

But as is happily typical in the National Park Service, the practical implementation of the I&RM and FOST programs varied from park to park, yet this helped to create additional confusion. A member of the Operational Evaluation staff in one region reports upon the present status of I&RM and FOST in his region:

"The Region has seven large I&RM areas or groups (permanent staff of 15 or more). In three cases the interpreter is subordinated and in three cases the interpreter is staff and has no line authority. In the other case the Chief, I&RM, is not an interpreter and there is no assistant.

"The Region has 14 smaller areas that have an I&RM organiation. In seven of those areas or groups the Chief (or the only I&RM employee) is either a ranger or a man without interpretive experience. The Region has 14 areas without an interpreter (mostly 'one-man' areas).

"The I&RM position qualifications are so flexible that almost anyone in the GS-025 (Park Manager) series can qualify. As a result many areas have recruited personnel that meet only minimum qualifications for key interpretive positions. Many of the Region's smaller areas are predominantly interpretive in scope with visitor protection and resource management being subordinate. In the past, many of these areas had for their senior graded (or only) uniformed staff position an interpreter. I&RM utilized

that position for Chief and subsequently they have been filled with ranger (general) oriented people.

"The problem, as I see it, is that FOST and I&RM are often thought of as being synonomous. The Region has (or recently has had) 12 FOST or clustered areas. Seven of these areas are I&RM, somewhere - either totally or at the district or satellite level. Five areas have maintained the 'classic organization.'"

He points out that because of the many patterns into which a park organization can be structured, "The FOST organization has been a good manager's delight because it can be organized in about any way the manager wishes. Some FOST organizations have been very successful."

Still another method of gaining broader utilization of staff talents was the establishment of cluster offices, responsible for the management of a group of parks. The cluster staff could provide advisory support for a number of parks within a geographic region. The only way to obtain positions for the cluster offices, however, was from the parks. The superintendent of a national park reported: "In some instances, the creation of group offices has halved the interpretive staff in the park selected. (This park) is a good example." Having an experienced interpreter in the cluster office was a step forward for many parks, particularly for planning and evaluation. But most parks considered that the cluster interpretive specialist did not eliminate the need for an experienced interpreter on site to direct local operations.

Another major factor contributing to a change of emphasis in park operations is the matter of law enforcement. The series of minor incidents which took place in a number of parks in the late 1960s culminated in the major disturbance in Yosemite National Park during the July 4th weekend in 1970. The Yosemite happening impressed upon NPS that its protective force lacked the training, if not the outlook, to handle confrontations of this kind. The result was immediate, an accelerated emphasis upon law enforcement, which in a time of budget and staff restrictions could be implemented only by reductions in other program areas. Interpretive training courses were replaced by law enforcement courses; priority was given to law enforcement where the opportunity existed in the parks to obtain new positions or to convert existing vacant positions.

Insofar as interpretation was concerned, the cumulative impact of these several administrative actions was to substantially reduce the number of professional interpretive positions - and professional interpreters - in the Park Service, and to place people who lacked strong interpretive qualifications in charge of interpretive programs. Quite probably, there

was an additional, if impossible to measure, impact: a prevailing belief that in a time of staff and budget shortages interpretation at the park level could be diminished.

A Chief of Operations Evaluation reports:

> "Shortly after the FOST and I&RM concepts were announced four or five years ago, some managers at both the regional and area levels proceeded to implement the programs without full analysis of secondary effects. And let me add that quite often this took place with considerable pressure from Washington Office staff. When I first arrived in my present position two years ago, I found that there were very few specialists interpretive positions in the small parks, the theory being that under the FOST guidelines these positions were no longer necessary, as the professional work could be performed by support staff at the regional and group area offices. As we began our evaluations, we noticed the lack of interest in interpretaion at the key staff level."

He lists three examples of the new approach.

1. At a National Memorial: "the Historian position was converted to a Supervisory Technician and a fellow with a bus and truck driver background was qualified to fill the job. The individual had no historical training."

2. At a National Monument: the region had established "a Chief of I&RM position and placed interpretation under the Chief. We transferred an individual to this position whose background was foreman of the tree crew and who had good experience in fire fighting. He, however, had no experience in interpretation."

3. At a National Park: "where for years there had been a very fine interpretive program, with two or three permanent interpreters, the interpretive program was placed under a Chief of Operations with two districts under the supervision of two district rangers. The number of interpreters was reduced to one individual."

One of the lapses of the administration of the I&RM and technician programs was that no record was kept of the number of positions eliminated, or converted from "professional" to technician, nor whether these position

changes were equitably distributed between protection and interpretation. As a result, NPS does not know the number of professional interpreter positions that have been eliminated since the beginning of the above programs. But from data and estimates provided by the Division of Staffing and Manpower Planning, it is possible to suggest the extent of the transformation.

At the beginning of the technician program there were throughout NPS about 270 positions (park guide, information receptionist) which were the equivalent of the present technician series. In February, 1973, there were about 525 positions in the technician series, a gain of 255. Of these, the estimate received is that perhaps 20 were new positions received from Congress. This means that some 235 technician positions were created by converting existing professional positions in the parks. Of these, the estimate received is "about half" were interpretive positions, and half were protection/resource management positions. The result, then, was that about 120 professional interpretive positions were converted. The estimate seems incredibly high, for it would indicate that between one-fourth and one-third of all of the professional interpretive positions in NPS were eliminated.

Whatever the number actually involved (and the lack of hard data is in itself an indication of the problem) a great many professional interpretive positions disappeared. Because the conversion was to technician grades, most of the positions were undoubtedly in the GS-7 range. The recent experience of one region suggests how the program did in fact almost wipe out interpretive positions at the GS-7 level.

> "We recently issued a region-wide vacancy announcement for a GS-9 Interpretive Specialist for a National Recreation Area. <u>There was only one response from the 52 areas of this region</u>. Now, why is this? Let me hazard an explanation. There is only one GS-7 Park Ranger (Naturalist) in this Region. I predict that if this trend continues and technicians begin to occupy GS-9 positions we will soon face a similar problem at the GS-11 level."

Following up this prediction, a request was made to the Division of Servicewide Career Development and Placement to review the reservoir of GS-9 interpreters from which certificates for GS-11 positions are prepared. In the first, or "1" screening, which includes both employees with experience as interpreters and those with no experience but who qualify by meeting minimum requirements, there were 170 cards. Of these, only slightly over one-third, 62, had requested consideration for interpretive positions. Of these, only 33 had at least two years in their

present positions (which by policy is the minimum incumbency, except for emergencies) and were therefore eligible for selection.

Of the 33, 10 received a rating of "would go out of my way to have on my staff;" 13 received a rating of "would be happy to have on my staff." The report noted that "This slim number of interpreters is further reduced by special interests, family considerations, health, and other matters that could preclude inclusions on a certificate for a particular position or location."

A regional Interpretive Specialist notes:

> "We have experienced difficulty in obtaining names to fill vacancies. I am aware of at least 4 certificates that have been forwarded to areas over the past 6-7 months in which no more than two names appeared. The answer to the question as to Why? has been simply that there were no other qualified, interested and available. In several cases, the names of those contained on the register were those of individuals who at best were questionably qualified for the position to be filled."

The general trend of the administrative changes is clear. There has been a serious reduction in the number of lower graded professional interpretive positions. As a result, there are fewer and fewer positions in which intake employees can be placed to begin their interpretive careers. And as a result, there is a smaller and smaller group of interpreters available for promotion into the middle grades.

Considering NPS needs in some 300 natural, historical, recreational, cultural and urban parks, as well as regional, Washington Office, Denver and Harpers Ferry Service Centers and special assignments, the report of the Division of Servicewide Career Development and Placement concludes: "The reservoir of employees possessing interpretive skills and desiring interpretive positions is very low indeed."

Interpretation Lacks Urgency

Without the necessary data it is not possible to accurately determine how interpretation has fared with respect to other operations activities, particularly law enforcement. And it is important always to keep in mind that this study was restricted to interpretation; an objective evaluation of the total impact on NPS operations would require a total study. But most people believe, with the Advisory Board, that in the competition for available resources, interpretation has suffered. Asked in the Questionnaire to respond to the following comment: "Interpretation has very definitely suffered from competition with law enforcement for operational needs," the vote was "yes," 575-361.

Significantly, this response does not seem to reflect a general anti-law enforcement attitude within the Service. Asked "Does law enforcement seem to be over-emphasized by the Park Service?" The response was "no," 596-363, with the interpreters and seasonals voting an equally strong "no," 346-191. The conclusion one draws from the results of the two questions on law enforcement is that one, employees believe the recent emphasis on law enforcement has been necessary, but two, because of limited resources this action resulted in a reduced emphasis on interpretation.

The Questionnaire did provide convincing evidence that in one highly important area interpretation has received its fair share of resources. The superintendents were asked to report the number of interpretive seasonal and permanent employees, and the number of park visitors, for the years 1960 and 1972. During this 12-year period the ratio of seasonal employees to total visitors has remained constant, with almost no variation among all regions. In 1960 the ratio was one seasonal to 105,000 visitors. In 1972 the ratio was one seasonal to 107,000 visitors. For the reporting parks the number of interpretive seasonals doubled between 1960 and 1972, as did the total number of visitors.

But the prosperity was not shared by the permanent interpreters. The ratio of permanent interpreters to total visitors in 1960 was one to 188,000; in 1972 the ratio was one to 315,000. Although there was a 100% increase in the number of interpretive seasonals, matching the 100% increase in total visitors for the areas reporting, the number of permanent interpreters rose by barely 20%. A considerable number of these were technicians. Experience indicates that the quality of the seasonal program is strongly influenced by professional supervision received; obviously the above figures show that the necessary supervision is being reduced.

Also, as many interpreters have pointed out, the problems of operating an interpretive program today make those of 1960 seem light years away. A great many new visitor facilities have been constructed, these alone absorbing a large percentage of the increase in seasonals. Where once a family group talking at leisure with the park interpreter was the typical scene at an information counter, visitors are now lined up several deep. "In the past decade the daily manhours required to operate one of the main visitor centers doubled, increasing from 11 manhours to 22 manhours," reports the chief naturalist of one national park.

To this expanding workload must be added the manpower demands of the many new interpretive programs of recent years: living history, demonstrations, Environmental Study Areas. Most park interpreters would probably reply "Right On" to the findings of a member of a regional office Operations Evaluation team while at Great Smokies.

> "Dave Beal and I identified 17 new programs from January, 1969 to June, 1971 that were initiated with no increases. In a situation like this, on-going programs must be slighted and quality is lost because the staff cannot spend the time needed to help develop the interpretive skills, supervise and provide the necessary logistics for the 'added on' programs."

Interpretation is always vulnerable during budget crunches, because de-emphasis in interpretive services does not have the striking affect upon visitors that closing a restaurant, a campground, or a gas station would have. One of the Grand Canyon participants, from the Canadian Park Service, suggests why interpretation programs, in any park system, are a prime area for budget cutting.

> "Interpretation is not generally a 'hot bed' issue. There are not the brush fire emergencies often associated with other areas of operations; public response is usually favorable no matter how limited interpretation is either in quantity or quality. Interpretation therefore all too easily becomes the victim of manpower and/or budget cuts because it simply 'does not hurt' as much or make as large waves as it would if other operational areas were short changed. It is therefore mandatory that resources needed for interpretation be given some high degree of protection by the Service."

But The Spiral Is Downward

The picture for NPS interpretation, however, is certainly not all bleak, and in fact one would do well to remember that hyperbole is not an unknown skill to an interpreter describing his plight. There are a great many parks which have top flight interpretive programs, although few can boast the luxury of Katmai. "With a seasonal visitation of around 1,500 and four seasonal Naturalists Katmai has been blessed with the opportunity for individualized visitor attention." More indicate the "my head is bloody but unbowed" attitude of the superintendent of Fort Larned:

> "The interpretive program at Fort Larned is alive and as well as can be expected with no visitor center available and with only one permanent and one seasonal employee taking care of all the various duties connected with the interpretive branch."

It is, however, a fact that many parks have suffered a drastic cut back in interpretive staffing. The State Director for Hawaii provides statistics for the two national parks in Hawaii. One, in 1961, for 770,000 visitors had three permanent naturalists and one information receptionist. In 1972, for 1,180,000 visitors, it had one park naturalist and one technician. The other, in 1961, for 70,000 visitors had one park naturalist. In 1972, for 280,000 visitors, it had an I&RM organization, no permanent interpreters and one seasonal working summers and off-season weekends.

It is also a fact that many substandard interpretive programs exist and that interpreters and superintendents cannot place the blame solely on the need for more people and money. The present level of staffing and funding, although admittedly considerably below what anyone would like it to be, has not prevented many parks from developing outstanding interpretive programs. In all such cases the secret seems to be the presence of a gifted interpreter. An organization that has attracted more than its share of the Charlie Sharp's of the world must have a lot going for it.

> "Fade to Lewis Eaton in the Trader's Store. Muttonchop sideburns, 1876 costume, a Yankee trader gleam in his eye - he sells the women everything from corsets to little parasols to flirt with, delicious beaver tails for dinner, or salt pork, or offers one a chew of cut plug (one lady from Tennessee took him up on it, and sat in the rocker beside the spittoon, and chawed away), or gives a Norwegian a salted codfish which he ate with relish, hadn't sniffed one in 20 years. If a western movie scout ever catches the act, we've lost him."

But at Fort Laramie and at the other parks with distinguished programs, it has been a tough battle to succeed, which involved (from the employees) considerable sacrifice and dedication above and beyond the Standards of Performance. "You can just bet that Interpretation has suffered in competion with other operational needs," says the Ft. Laramie superintendent.

But lack of staff and funds in some parks has effectively barred interpretive development, particularly at the newly established areas:

> "Johnstown Flood has one cast aluminum wayside exhibit on the south abutment and that is the complete in-place interpretive program. Added this past summer is a trail to the South Fork of the Little Conemaugh River - the river that broke the dam. The trail possesses great potential but without funds to provide for the exhibits that could really tell the story of the flood or the current environmental story of a river 'dead' from pollution, the story will have to wait."

At Allegheny Portage Railroad:

> "The physical remains of the railroad are the poorest exhibits. Unexcavated, filled with debris, covered with brush or excavated and unstabilized is what we have to show."

In summary, reports the General Superintendent of the Western Pennsylvania Group:

> "The state of our interpretive program is possibly like that of many parks; lacking in proper facilities. Philosophy is not what we are lacking, it is the funds and the staff funds can buy."

The superintendent of Glen Canyon lists 10 visitor activities, all admirable projects, to enhance visitor appreciation of the recreation area, but for which no staff or funds are available. He reports on a moving example of this kind of frustration.

> "Earlier this year we conducted a 2-day environmental encampment for 225 Indian youth. This program could have been improved had we sufficient VIP funds to bring in Indian speakers and dancers. But under fiscal limitations, this was not possible. We do work closely with Indian groups across the Reservation and we know some of the children would have liked to have attended but were unable

to do so because of transportation costs. Next year, some of those groups will be confronted with this same problem. How grateful they would be if some sort of financial assistance would be worked out!"

The superintendent of Grand Teton, who as a part of this survey asked his seasonal staff to offer recommendations for improving interpretation at Grand Teton, was gratified by their enthusiastic response, but made this comment upon their suggestions:

"They presuppose a plentiful staff, a staff that greatly exceed the size required to simply operate constructed facilities and take care of the typical visitors. This park has not been able to move beyond a maintenance level of interpretation in the past decade."

Asked on the Questionnaire, "Is your park interpretive program now operating at standard?" only 23 of 121 superintendents reported their interpretive operation met minimum standards. More than 100 parks reported that because of lack of manpower there were important facilities and services which could not be made available to visitors.

The problem certainly cannot be solved simply by diverting staff resources from other park operational activities, thereby merely shifting the location of the problem. All of the participants at Grand Canyon were in agreement on this point, asking only that interpretation receive its justified allowance. "Do not send interpretation off on a rocket only to have it come crashing down a year or so from now."

One effect of inadequate staffing, particularly of professional interpreters, is an inevitable loss of quality, perhaps the most disturbing trend of all. It may well be more difficult to raise quality, once it has declined, than to replace lost positions. As over-crowding dilutes the quality of the wilderness experience, excessive crowds at an interpretive program has an equally detrimental effect.

"It is our belief that interpretation here at Mesa Verde, and probably throughout the whole of the Park Service, has undergone profound changes. In this park the massive increase in visitation has forced changes upon us. We have cliff dwellings open on a self-guided basis, visitors queued up in lines waiting for tickets or frustrated when tickets are gone, and badly overcrowded tours. At Mesa Verde, however, there is no suspicion that other operational needs have forced interpretation to take a back seat - we simply have more visitors than we can handle."

This, then, is the dilemma of NPS interpretation today. There has never been a time when so many opportunities existed for the national parks to serve the needs of people; there has never been a time when the resources needed to provide the programs are so inadequate.

Something, obviously, had to give, and interpretation lacks the urgency of some other park activities: the need to protect visitors against a rapid increase in car clouting; the need to preserve a crumbling historic structure; the need to repair damage to the park road and trail system by an unusually destructive winter. One, or two, or perhaps more guided walks can be dropped. One vacant interpretive position can be converted into a law enforcement ranger. In this sense interpretation generally is the first to be cut.

> "There is the fire to put out, the riot to stop, the insect to control, the elk to reduce, the washout to repair, the sewer to restore, the climber to rescue, the correspondent to help, and the environment to save. Interpretation can wait. And in the competitive world of government funding, that's what's wrong with interpretation. Did interpretation decline because of inadequate funding, or did declining quality cause funding to be withdrawn? Either way, the spiral falls in the same direction."

THREE

THE INTERPRETER

The essential ingredient in the development of a quality interpretive program is the park interpreter who conceives and directs the program in the park.

> "He must possess the personality that allows him to communicate. He must also have a deep interest and a tremendous enthusiasm for his work. Otherwise no amount of education and training can develop him to be effective. I think the gist of the problem is how to find these people through the normal recruiting process."

Unfortunately, people with these qualifications, as has been described in the preceding section, are becoming increasingly rare. It is the concensus of all those who participated in the study that this kind of interpreter should be placed upon the endangered species list. A long time interpreter:

> "In spite of what certain of my associates may contend, I cannot believe that we have <u>always</u> been low man on the totem. I believe, however, that we currently are experiencing a definite low ebb in attitudes within interpretation. Some of the concern over the future is whether or not there actually is one for the field interpreter and his successors."

For perhaps a combination of the conditions described in the report thus far, interpreters as a group do not speak highly of the prospects for a career within the field of interpretation. This opinion is shared by other NPS employees. Asked in the Questionnaire, "Does the park interpreter now have adequate opportunity for advancement in the career of interpretation?" NPS people in all categories voted "no," 517-363.

While it is speculative to attempt to measure the morale of any group in any organization, there are certainly a considerable number of people, not in interpretation, who are concerned that interpreters have lost considerable confidence in the vitality of their profession. No one, at either the regional or Washington levels, seems to be responsible for the interpreters or to oversee the impact which a variety of organizational and procedural changes have had upon their role. The lack of this identifiable responsibility has encouraged a certain amount of skepticism with which interpreters regard official references to the essential role which interpretation plays in the administration of national parks. A region office observer, recently a park naturalist, believes the situation is critical.

"I think the most serious problem we have in interpretation is morale. People are leaving interpretation like boys left the farms during the dust bowl years and before long interpretation will be about as empty as the abandoned farm house. We must reinstate spirit and pride in the profession. A career ladder must be provided and being a professional interpreter must again become an end unto itself, for many."

One former chief interpreter, who has held a succession of management positions, believes that the net result of the series of organizational and procedural changes designed to both improve efficiency and achieve quality control of interpretation,

> "has resulted in many positive improvements, but it has also had negative influences. On the personnel level the net result has been diminished job content and influence for the field interpreter. Control of research, publications, exhibits, audiovisual programs and interpretive planning has been either partially or completely eliminated from many interpretive positions. It is important to leave sufficient job content in these positions to attract and retain high motivated and qualified people and to properly develop future well-rounded interpreters."

A cause of special irritation to the park interpreter was the edict against local production of museum exhibits and audiovisual programs. At the time of the activation of the Harpers Ferry Center a memorandum was sent to the field imposing this restriction. It was well intentioned; its purpose was to improve quality by utilizing the professional staff and facilities of HFC. The order was generated by the occasional appearance of home-made, and rather unprofessional, graphics and exhibits. But in the minds of most interpreters, the policy

> "instructed field interpreters not to engage in any initiative of their own. For the imaginative it was disastrous and for the lazy it was a blessing."

Many felt, with justification, they were capable of producing acceptable programs. Few policy statements have stimulated such bitter opposition.

Yet obedience to the policy has hardly been absolute. Spurred by emergency needs, or the creative impulse, quite a number of parks have produced their own programs, sometimes with commendable results, although sometimes not. The superintendent of Badlands reports (note an obvious bias against formal museums):

"We have converted a small, inadequate audiovisual room into 'Touch and Feel' sensory type exhibits on rocks, fossils, animal skin, skulls, etc. The visitor greatly appreciates this sense testing display, and far more comment about and use this room over the regular 'sterile' exhibit room. They now know what buffalo hide and hair, a deer antler, horse skull, snake skin, and Oligocene fossils feel and look like close up."

The elimination of research responsibilities from the duties of the park interpreter was regarded by most park interpreters with equal disappointment. Previously, the ability to do research was often a deciding factor in recruitment, especially for historians. The research decision has made possible the development of a considerably more extensive and effective research capability, particularly in the natural sciences. It did, however, remove a valued activity from the duties of many interpreters, although specified research activities have recently been added.

While interpreters agreed the removal of research responsibility would allow them more time to concentrate on communicating the park story to visitors, they were concerned that the level of communication would tend to become more superficial. Later recruiting emphasis was in fact directed toward candidates who gave evidence of an ability to communicate, and a wide variety of educational backgrounds were accepted as qualification, some with a rather remote relationship to park resources. When, as a result of the technician program, the interpreter received the title of park ranger, he had some cause to believe that knowledge in depth of his subject matter no longer was considered essential.

All in all, interpretation as a career in itself has lost some of its former attractions. The field Assistant to the Director believes:

"The most disconcerting aspect is the fact that so many of our young interpretive people are setting their sights on management opportunities for they do not see clearly the steps of the promotion ladder in the interpretive or professional field."

Must He Be A Switch Hitter?

A question debated with considerable heat these days is just how general can a specialist be? One of the few arguments in support of the generalist interpreter comes from a Pinnacles correspondent who believes that I&RM

> "can boost the interpretive program without undercutting resources management if the chiefs of I&RM are carefully selected for balanced attitudes and a balance of skills which they have developed through a variety of kinds of experience."

That states the original philosophy quite well; the problem comes along later with the practical application. Just as there is a scarcity in professional baseball of switch hitters of the Mickey Mantle variety, who can bat equally well right handed or left handed, there is a scarcity in the National Park Service of people with "balanced" attitudes, and a "balance of skills" developed through a "variety" of experiences.

But the theory presupposes there is a plentiful supply of people who have equal interest and skills in resource management and protection and interpretation, and have equal experience in each. The success of the concept also depends upon the expectation that a person without previous experience in interpretation can direct an interpretive program as well as an interpreter. One employee who believed this would require at the least considerable training in both fields reports his experience.

> "Even those who might want to take courses in some field other than their own assignment or interest either can not get into the classes because of small numbers chosen, or because they are told it isn't in their job needs."

A person must know his job to be effective, he must also be committed to the work that he does. People with no previous interpretive experience have entered the interpretive field, often as a result of I&RM and FOST, for a number of reasons, including the normal reaction that it offers a chance for promotion. One superintendent who had great difficulty in obtaining an experienced interpreter for a GS-9 interpretive specialist position, settled for a person with a background in protection work.

> "Although interested, complete with new ideas and concepts, he is still a ranger at heart, and he now feels left out because he is the Interpretive Specialist for the area. He is qualified on paper, but we neglected to check his own personal emotional desires."

There is no doubt that anyone would be hard pressed to establish precise boundaries for the fields of resource management, visitor and resource protection, information and interpretation. They are closely intertwined. Certainly the visitor believes that all uniformed people in the park are rangers. There seems to be no argument that all ranger types should participate in interpretation or that interpretive types should participate in protection activities. Asked whether they agreed with the statement "A good interpreter should also be able to assist in law enforcement, search and rescue, wildfire and building fire control, and similar duties when the need arises," the response was "yes," 795-171; the interpreters voted "yes," 239-51.

One of the results of I&RM has been confusion as to what constitutes visitor services.

> "It seems to me that visitor service is exactly what the words say - we protect the visitors and the resources only when we serve the visitors; we serve the visitors only when they know they why behind the rule and the why behind the fact or knowledge."

To a much greater degree than in any previous era of NPS history, there is a need for experienced, well trained and skilled interpreters in the parks. The contemporary period of environmental emphasis brings to the parks visitors who are increasingly well informed. NPS environmental education programs demand thorough subject matter knowledge. Use of the parks by elementary, secondary and college level classes requires that the park be represented by someone capable of responding to educators and students of whatever educational level.

The answer, for most NPS people, is not the I&RM generalist, but the interpretive specialist. Acknowledging that I&RM, "a fine management theory," has worked in some places, the Mt. McKinley superintendent concludes that if a park is to achieve quality interpretation,

> "what is needed is a specialist to manage this function, someone who has the technical, varied background to handle the job. A generalist can manage the day-to-day procedural things, but to instill and maintain that certain undefinable ingredient it is essential that an on-the-scene expert be available."

Or, as a retired former chief naturalist put it bluntly:

> "It's high time the NPS recognizes that working with people and doing accurate yet entertaining interpreting takes a special, specialized skill."

Interpretive programs in the field must have the solid ring of truth, declares an environmental education specialist.

> "We need more people with professional training in special fields such as ecology. These ecologists could work chiefly in an advisory capacity but should also participate in research and interpretive programs. Where traditional interpretation has not done the necessary job, it was chiefly because we did not adequately understand or communicate ecological principles and concepts. I observed this along guided walks in situations where interpreters could have related to broader environmental concerns if they had understood ecological concepts. Ecologists could help us understand these concepts as well as supply us with some of the necessary information."

A former Associate Director speaks of the unforeseen impact of recent organizational developments upon the park interpreter.

> "We bought too many generalists with the sacrifice of those skilled in our professional endeavors. As I look at it today, however, the pendulum has begun to swing back, but I fear not fast enough."

Putting His Own House In Order

The interpreter does need help, but to be fair it should be recognized that there are some interpreters who have a sizable task of putting their own house in order. While it is hoped that NPS intends to make appropriate and feasible changes to support interpretation, there is still an area in which only the interpreter himself can effect change - the upgrading of his own program.

During the 1972 season an effort was made by the Pacific Northwest Region to evaluate the quality of the visitor services programs in selected parks. The survey was carried out by the Michigan State University Department of Parks and Recreation, and concentrated upon the personal services programs, most of which were conducted by seasonals. The conclusion was critical of the quality of the programs reviewed, and the summary evaluation supports the thesis that NPS interpretation has declined.

> "Observed interpretation represented an average which was just adequate to slightly below. There were no programs in the excellent category, a few very good, some adequate, some poor and a few of the worst ever witnessed anywhere."

If this review represents a fair sample of NPS interpretive programs, and if the evaluation was both knowledgeable and objective, the personal service programs of NPS collectively rate a "C minus." This grade is unacceptable.

The structuring of a park interpretive program is not unlike rehearsing and staging a series of theater presentations. There are many actors in the park cast (indeed some are in costume), many scripts, many stage settings. Perhaps because of this similarity with the theater, things have a tendency to go sour with interpretation occasionally. At Grand Canyon Dave Dame gave his formula for avoiding boredom in the Manhattan Cluster: eliminate half the program content every six months and start over. While that might be a little hairy for most people (it might even be a slight exaggeration on Dave's part), the approach is laudable.

It is time for new approaches, for experimenting with new ways to present what to many will be old truths. Converting the noisy, haphazard clutter of the rubber rafts which had long plagued Yosemite's Merced River, into an environmental float trip was only one of many inventive approaches introduced by the Yosemite staff. The development of Summer In The Parks was a truly revolutionary step for NCP - and for NPS - which has quickly become a part of the total culture of Washington, D.C.

Perhaps because of the nature of their work, interpreters like to communicate with one another, to exchange ideas and to find out what new approaches are being tried and with what results. The elimination of the interpreters "Newsletter" closed one avenue. Placing all interpretive and protective positions in the same series was another obstacle. Today the personnel office has no way to identify field interpreters. When an attempt was made to send the Questionnaire to a random sample of park interpreters, the regional personnel offices had no way to identify, within the ranger series, which were practicing interpreters. There needs to be a better means of communication and exchange among the field interpreters.

One of the few such opportunities for interpreters to rap is offered by the Mather Training Center, whose training programs are well received by interpreters and superintendents. In terms of quality, quantity and variety, the courses offered at Mather received a high rating on the Questionnaire. The Mather Center can be a strong factor in helping introduce, and evaluate, new interpretive techniques and approaches.

The reason that not all park interpreters have taken advantage of breakthroughs pioneered in other parks could be a somewhat tepid attitude toward experiments on the part of some superintendents and regional offices. If NPS wants the park interpretive programs to sparkle, a climate must exist in which, through trial and error, the interpreter can build his program.

Reflecting upon the need to build into the system a means of stimulating and experimenting with new interpretive ideas and concepts, at the least cost in funds and manpower, the superintendent of Padre Island advanced this suggestion (independently submitted by a number of people):

> "Could we have sites selected in the National Park System that are operating and feasibly adjacent to population areas as experimental interpretive areas? This idea would envision the staffing of these sites with experienced interpreters (who somehow get lost in regions and other administrative situations) and also new staff to set about really looking seriously into what we are doing. But far more than that would be the group trying new ideas on the visiting public, the school groups, and all types of scheduled special groups in new programs. Upon the implementing of these new programs at the selected site, a training program would then ensue. Interpreters from the field would then spend a couple of weeks at these centers and evaluate the potential to their parks."

It is to be hoped that the technicians of the National Park Service will not consider this report a wholesale criticism of their contributions. Technicians play an important and vital role in NPS interpretation. There have in fact been relatively few criticisms of the development of the technician series to carry out specified portions of the interpretive program in the parks. "Personally," reports one superintendent, "I support the concept. I feel that it provides an opportunity for many fine people to enter into positions which have more potential." Although called by different names, there have been technician-type interpretive positions in the parks for a long time. The recent development of the technician series was in part an effort to provide similar positions in the protective field.

"I have a technician (over-qualified) who is doing a bang up job running our program," declares a superintendent who also has some words about the policy against hiring "over-qualified" technicians. The point was made repeatedly at the Grand Canyon meeting that it is unfortunate the term "professional" is used to differentiate between the 025 and 026 series. This would seem to indicate that the program presented by the technician is "unprofessional," or substandard.

Those who practice interpretation are practicing an art. There are examples of accomplished artists, historians, and naturalists who are totally self taught, and some technicians have this natural gift. Interpretive programs, as presented by some technicians, are highly "professional." One interpreter has suggested that "We should rely more on the term 'competent' than on the word 'professional,'" perhaps a much more valid differentiation.

One does not have to have university training in history to be able to develop a Bicentennial program for a Revolutionary War area, but the person with such training has a generally clear advantage over the person who does not. A regional interpretive specialist notes?

> "In general, if we lack a professional interpreter in a small area, we usually find that the operation of the program is below standard."

Mark Twain's classic comment about the weather, that everyone talks about it but no one does anything about it, could be applied to the role of the seasonal interpreter in the Park Service. It is through the seasonals, interpretive and protective, that the parks are operated during the travel season. Not many park interpreters, however, believe the program for recruiting, training and supervising seasonals is outstanding.

There are probably more stipulations and restrictions on the recruitment and hiring of seasonals than on any other category of employee. One does not need to recount the difficulties. They are formidable and disheartening. There is the logistical problems involved in getting the seasonals to report for duty when needed; the difficulty of devising a training program equally helpful to the neophyte and the veteran ("the presentation of a truly successful seasonal interpretive training program is probably almost non-existent through the Service," declares one superintendent); the slam bang sprint into full operations; the too large ratio of permanents to seasonals ("At Wind Cave and Jewel Cave there are 35 to 40 seasonal interpreters with only one permanent interpreter on the staff.").

Running a successful seasonal interpretive program under these conditions is rather clear evidence of superior management skills. It would be great if some kind of sure fire prescription could be devised and packaged. But if the interpreter intends to achieve a superior program, there probably is no magic formula. It will require about the same philosophy and dedication that Vince Lombardi applied to the Packers - a return to fundamentals and a consistent attention to details.

But the NPS seasonal has changed. He does not conform to the traditional stereotype of the NPS seasonal: a middle-aged, married, college teacher, veteran of many years service. The Questionnaire was sent to a carefully chosen sample of seasonals from 12 parks in each region - natural, historical and recreation; large, medium and small. The data obtained provided this profile of the typical NPS seasonal in the summer of 1972:

Age 29; single; a graduate student (63 graduate and 33 undergraduate students to only 5 college level and 30 intermediate-high school level teachers); worked an average of 4 years, in a single park. Less than half hired on the basis of a personal interview.

The "season" has also changed, perhaps contributing to the changing profile of the seasonal. In past years the park visitor season coincided nicely with the school and college vacation season, leading to the mutually beneficial relationship between school and college teachers and NPS. A comment from Nez Perce sums up the present dilemma.

> "The rub is that most seasonal interpretive programs should now be operated for periods up to six or eight months of the year to meet recognized changes and trends in travel and visitation pattersn. School years are lengthening steadily. The result is no time for a spring induction training session, the impossible problem of cranking up a program in a Park already drowning in visitors, then a six-to-eight week run before fall classes start decimating interpretive ranks - regardless of what the seasonal employee might have promised you last spring. Seasonal recruitment needs new sources of talent with a longer availability span."

The seasonals, then, are young, perhaps the most important single factor. A number of parks are taking advantage of skilled and eager college students available year round under work-study programs arranged through the colleges. They relate to young visitors, many of whom are turned off by traditional approaches. Seasonals, like their young audience, want to be involved.

Reviewing the seasonal response to the Questionnaire, there is a recurring criticism that the permanet interpreters do not actively involve themselves sufficiently in operations, although there is also sympathy for the size of the paper workload. A suggestion from a Northeast Region seasonal:

> "Greater rapport between professionals and seasonals, particularly concerning evaluation. This could be achieved if professionals were not so far removed from visitor contact, isolated in their offices, and knew what people are currently interested in and the difficulty of putting that across."

Asked on the Questionnaire, "What are the most important things the Park Service could do to improve your effectiveness?" one seasonal gave a blunt reply which all interpreters should ponder:

"Upgrade my position to reflect my education and experience. It seems now to be limited by the fact that I am a seasonal - a very poor criteria. Allow me to make better use of my background and experience. Provide more money for interpretive activities. Allow more time for obtaining first hand experience with the phenomena to be interpreted. Allow me greater participation in the policy-making decisions at the park (I have had 13 summers). Reduce the amount of 'red tape' involved in making changes or effecting improvements."

His points are valid. Many seasonals deserve higher grades and added responsibilities. For parks with limited budgets, higher grades could result in fewer seasonals, a tough choice. But there are too many seasonals worth considerably more than their GS-4 or GS-5 rating. One recommendation is inescapable, that the seasonal be allowed to participate in the development of the program.

Bill Whelan, who helped developed such an approach in Yosemite, offered this suggestion:

"Rather than structuring the program for the seasonals, invite them in to help develop the structure. Want new ideas? Bring the seasonals together frequently to evaluate progress, and to consider changes in direction. If you want maximum enthusiasm and effectiveness from your seasonals, then give them some of the action!"

Among many suggestions received, two recommendations for upgrading seasonal interpretation seem particularly worthy of Service adoption. The first deals with improving communication skills, a major recommendation of the Michigan State survey. A park that has borrowed the seasonal communications specialist employed at Yellowstone comments on the great value of such experts.

"As an experienced seasonal he knows what the summer interpreter needs and can give it to him in a brief but interesting manner. It seems that more of these seasonal communications specialists could be found. They would not necessarily have to work all season in any one Park but could circuit-ride through Parks, or one could appear for a short assignment in one Park just for the basic training program."

The other suggestion comes from a seasonal who pleads for better training:

> "For those of us who are 'permanent' seasonals and serve as supervisors, a session at Harpers Ferry Training Center prior to the regular season (or during it, if necessary) could enormously whet our appreciation for what the NPS is all about, its aims, goals, structure, and role in the NATION."

And the seasonals also would like to exchange ideas; one seasonal suggesting,

> "We need more training with seasonal employees from other parks whereby we can exchange ideas with one another."

NPS has not yet found a way to make effective use of the seasonal's talents between seasons. A veteran employee at Great Smokies suggested the considerable contribution which NPS seasonals can make to the environmental movement after they get back "home."

> "The park service has so much at stake in the performance of its seasonal personnel, who for a very busy three months are the ambassadors for an important branch of the federal government. There is, however, another somewhat hidden and sometimes never to be realized value tied in with efforts to turn out well trained, competent interpreters. To me the potential role of the National Park Service in this battle is exciting, for in addition to providing ammunition for some of the troops (people who got the message through something they did or heard in a national park, plus those kids who have spent a week or more of school at a park situated environmental education center) the Park Service may also be providing the leaders; men and women who, as national park seasonals, gained the impetus that has made them the articulate, well informed directors of community action for conservation and anti-pollution battles all over America."

The Future Interpreter

The most difficult profile to draw is the one for the new interpreters entering the Service. At the moment, NPS is not in a sense recruiting for interpreters, but to achieve a certain "mix" in educational background, from which interpreters later can be identified. Although a variety of systems have been employed in recent years for establishing such a mix, during the 1973 fiscal year the following targets were used:

Academic Discipline	Number of Candidates to be Appointed
History	35-40
Archeology	8-12
Natural Sciences	20-25
Social Sciences (including urban planning, sociology, psychology, business administration, economics)	30-40
Police Science	5-8
Park Administration and Outdoor Recreation	10-12

There is considerable disagreement as to the overall qualifications of the recent intake graduates. Asked the question at the Grand Canyon meeting, Lon Garrison, then Supervisor of Albright, expressed the belief that the new people coming through Albright are as a group first rate. There should be no doubt that NPS is getting the absolutely top young people. It is difficult to understand how any other Federal agency could offer as attractive and meaningful career as the National Park Service.

The Albright Training Center should play a more influential role in NPS interpretation. It shares in the overall responsibility of selecting candidates for the intake program, and there probably is no more important stage in the upgrading of interpretation. Albright should assume a more substantial role in identifying and encouraging promising young interpreters. To carry out this responsibility effectively, Albright - and the Mather Training Center - should be brought into the mainstream of all discussions and deliberations dealing with interpretation and interpreters. To a far greater degree than other elements of interpretation on the regional and Washington level, the training centers get involved with interpreters in an extended and personal relationship.

Most people would agree that candidates for careers in the uniformed ranks of NPS should possess to a high degree the perhaps old fashioned virtues of motivation and commitment. And it is generally easier to recruit for talent than for enthusiasm. For this reason, the ranks of

the seasonals would seem to be one of the best possible sources of appointments to permanent positions for it gives NPS the chance to closely review a candidates qualification's over one or more seasons, and provides the candidate with sufficient opportunity to decide whether he wants to make the Service a career.

If there is a career in interpretation, NPS should recruit for people with outstanding potential as future interpreters, and not depend upon casting a net from which an assortment of interpreters may later be created or converted. If necessary, and if sufficently well qualified interpreters are not available in the middle or even upper grades, highly qualified people, on occasion, should be brought in from outside the Service. But to provide for the work of interpretation, and to offer learning opportunities for the new arrivals, it was pointed out at Grand Canyon:

> "It is imperative that more professional career interpretive positions be established at the lower grade levels in order that interpreters might receive adequate training and experience for higher positions."

Yet the following observation from an interpreter is typical.

> "Our organization is still attractive to many fine young people seeking careers. Too often, however, we are unable to reach these people through our recruiting channels. We continue to attract excellent seasonal employees, but seldom can we offer them careers."

There must be a way.

FOUR

THE PARK RESPONSIBILITY

"The Park program is the key to Service interpretation," declared one of the teams at Grand Canyon. It is such an obvious statement of fact that it is often overlooked. The park superintendent and his staff have the decisive role in developing the park interpretive program, and given this responsibility are equally responsible for the quality and substance of that program.

The reasons why considerable erosion has taken place in the actual responsibility of a park to plan and execute its own distinctive program are several, some of which have been discussed in previous sections. Predominant, perhaps, is the fact that NPS is a bureaucracy, in which a number of natural laws are eternally at work, among them that authority always rises toward the top, and that most administrative procedures adopted have the effect of homogenizing the operations of an organization, rather than insuring the opportunity for individual differences.

This study would be doing a disservice if it attempted to establish, for example, a list of the specific kinds of interpretive programs which should, or should not, be included in the schedule of every park. Operating under the most general and flexible guidelines, it is the park superintendent and his staff who must be permitted - and encouraged - to make these important decisions. A Western Region superintendent:

> "Recognition should be evident among higher management that variety and even uniqueness exist among parks, their surrounding socio-geographic environments and especially their visitors. These factors are poorly served by generalizations which are then applied like a blanket Servicewide. It is this de facto centralization that stifles creativity, experimentation and innovation. The climate is in fact, not what it is declared to be."

Getting responsibility fixed on the proper level is a two-way exercise, however. Ideally, the upper levels of NPS would extend, and the parks would confidently accept, this role. But a part of the reason why authority consistently flows upward is that some field level administrators prefer to avoid such responsibility, with its necessary risk taking. A superintendent analyzes the problem:

> "It seems to me we have a 'they' syndrome. Ask 'them' to solve the problem and maybe 'they' will. If they don't, it will be their fault anyway. The responsibility for improving the quality of interpretation is with the park. WASO and region can, and should, supply support and technical advice. The park, and only the park, can improve quality."

The key to achieving this quality is the park interpreter, and the quality of the program can be no better than the quality of the interpretive staff. There never are enough good interpreters, and if all indications are correct, there is a severe shortage currently. Asked the question what one thing was needed to improve interpretation in his park, one superintendent cryptically answered: "Give me a permanent professional interpreter position to replace the one I lost during the park technician push,"

An interpreter's task, in determining the best mix of interpretive activities, is a demanding one. The most typical visitor element is the family group, and structuring a program that is meaningful for all ages in a family is not easy. The interpretive objective is not simply to identify by name the mosses, grasses, and lichens, and to differentiate between fir, spruce, and pine, but to convey the concept that all living things are related and are interdependent. Yet, the taxonomic identification may be appropriate, in some cases.

There never is a shortage of suggestions from interested parties as to what kinds of programs the interpreter should include. This historical park needs an Environment Study Area, that national monument needs a living history demonstration, both need rap sessions for young people. Selecting those which are appropriate to his park and its visitors, determining how each shall be presented in order to achieve a rich and meaningful whole - this demands both a high degree of talent and experience, and a thorough knowledge of the park, its resources, and its visitors. No doubt the recipient of much advice on his program, one park naturalist observed:

> "If interpretation tried to carry out all the objectives recommended for it, the visitor would receive a mish-mash of safety, resource-management difficulties, regulations, plant and animal identification, geology and environmental processes."

The only solution, concluded one of the Grand Canyon teams, is to charge the park superintendent and his staff with the ultimate responsibility for all elements of the interpretive program.

> "Field areas must be given and must assume a very high degree of responsibility for decisions regarding the approach, method, volume, personnel, equipment and innovations used in their interpretive endeavors."

With the parks exercising this control over the direction and content of interpretation, a number of working relationships might be improved, and program emphasis defined.

Offsite Priorities

With an unceasing demand, particularly from school organizations, for assistance in environmental education programs, an appropriate balance must be struck between onsite and offsite programs. This is a local decision, but it should respond to a Servicewide policy guideline. At Grand Canyon the recommendation was that

> "First priority should be given to meeting the needs of onsite visitors with the offsite programs and involvement being given to the extent funding and staffing will permit."

The Regional Office

In the sometimes confusing matter of the relationship between parks and the regional office, the answers to the following item from the Questionnaire at first seemed contradictory. "Does the regional office provide adequate direction and technical support needed by the park for its interpretive program?" The vote was only slightly in the affirmative, 328-289. The puzzling part was in the breakdown: superintendents and interpreters voted a substantial "yes," 268-168; regional office staff people voted a substantial "no," 85-50.

Extensive discussions of these results invariably arrived at the same explanation. The parks, sensitive to their perogatives, want a minimum of direction from the regional office; the regional office, established to provide assistance, would like to provide more support. Larger parks need (or would accept) little if any direction; smaller parks require substantial help. Both would like to be in the position of initiating requests for either direction or technical support.

The Harpers Ferry Center (and the Denver Service Center)

One of the stickiest relationships is that between the parks and the Harpers Ferry Center. The relationship of the interpreter to the Denver Service Center is somewhat different, as DSC carries out many programs which while interpretation related, do not fall within the interpreter's responsibility. It is to be hoped that the superintendent does involve the interpreter in consideration of the impact of all planning and development projects - and that the interpreters accept this important responsibility.

Because the professional disciplines required by HFC (and DSC) can seldom be recruited from the field, there is criticism that people "don't understand" park problems. While the exhibit designer (or architect) seldom is knowledgeable, in depth, about Civil War military tactics, the Civil War historian has probably had equally little exposure to exhibit capabilities (or architectural matters). "HFC is too superficial," says the historian; "the historians want a text book on the wall," says the exhibit designer. Often the park complaint that HFC does not "consult" can be translated as does not "agree."

The observation from Gettysburg, that "Harpers Ferry must always be careful not to form a closed community of 'professionals,' divorced completely from the field," is a valid one, to which both HFC and DSC might well reply, "or vice versa." The fact that the regional director approves the exhibit or architectural plan guarantees that the park has the ultimate responsibility.

Still, the point needs to be made the HFC products contribute vitally to the park interpretive program. Since the author of this report could hardly claim total objectivity on the subject, he submits the obviously unbiased evaluation of a former chief park naturalist:

> "The field interpreter not only has better tools than ever before to shape his local program, but he-we-ought to take pride in knowing that the NPS is among the leaders - the leader in some areas - in our special field of communication. It's so easy to carp at Harpers Ferry (and, Lord knows, I've done my share of it), but when you look at where we were 10-15 years ago in exhibits, publications and A/V and compare it with today, and when you listen to what park visitors are saying about our media, I think you have to give the highest marks to the production side of our program."

Another high mark needs to be given to the support HFC gives to park interpretation through the audiovisual equipment depot system. While it was perhaps to be expected that the Questionnaire would show a sizable majority of NPS people approving the design quality and subject content of the publications, museum exhibits and audiovisual programs, it was something of a shock, considering all past criticisms, to learn that by a three to one majority the dependability of AV equipment was endorsed. But a better record by HFC is also needed in the area of meeting target dates for completion of projects. This is a complex problem, in which many elements are involved. Excelsior!

There are several areas in which improvements are necessary in the park-HFC partnership. Better communications are needed, both ways, with facilitation from the regional office. HFC needs to keep the parks better informed on the progress - or lack of progress - on their projects. Often the problem is that park interpreters do not know how to make the system work or who to contact for help, and both HFC and the regions can improve this situation. As Pat Miller, Midwest Region (and a thoughtful contributer to this report) declared, we

> "simply must get Harpers Ferry Center, the Regions, Environmental Interpretation, and the field areas on the same wave length. Team spirit is necessary. Any kind of spirit would help."

As a contribution to this spirit, HFC recommends that the infamous memo prohibiting parks from producing interpretive programs be rescinded, but that the Grand Canyon recommendation be followed: "HFC is the keeper of quality standards."

Things That Can Be Done

Working in a climate which promotes, or better, demands that interpreters make do on short rations, the park interpretive staff can profit from successful experiments in other parks. The existing ceiling on VIP funds prevents expansion of this rewarding program, but there generally is a reservoir locally of artists, photographers, or musicians, many of whom can somehow be brought into the program at minimal cost. Cooperating associations have been the source of these funds. A few parks have established seminars in such fields as geology and ornithology, operated by the cooperating associations. University specialists are paid a modest honorarium and visitors pay a small fee for a one day, or several day seminar and field observation program.

The considerable accomplishments of the Yosemite Institute thus far suggest that there may be many kinds of "Institutes" which could be divised to meet the conditions in other parks. The vehicle might be a working relationship with a university, or it might be an enlargement of the function of a cooperating association.

Visitor services programs are necessarily designed for the casual visitor, and tend to be geared to the quick pace of most visitors. This is a good time to recall the prediction of Lt. Gustavus C. Doane about the use of the first national park:

> "in the branches of geology, mineralogy, botany, zoology, and ornithology, it is probably the greatest laboratory that nature furnishes on the surface of the globe."

The ambitious program for NPS interpretation, urged by the Conservation Foundation's Task Force on "The National Park Service as an Educational and Cultural Institution," is more a statement of aspirations than a set of attainable goals. Accomplishment would require doubling or tripling the present staff capabilities, and would probably require a somewhat enlarged delegation of responsibility from Congress. But the goals expressed for interpretation, and the idealism, are laudable:

> "It means creating, encouraging, funding and, above all, piloting a variety of programs with a variety of groups to investigate, research, teach, respond to, create from, and otherwise promote the highest environmental ideals."

All interpreters should digest the Task Force report. There are many things that can be done. The report suggests, for example, that many visitors would respond eagerly if scientists, of whatever disciplines, and creative artists, whether novelists, sculptors or folk singers, could be injected into the program.

> "There has been much talk about 'bringing parks to people,' meaning acquiring physical sites near urban areas. This is certainly a worthwhile goal. But we think there is another meaning for the phrase 'bringing parks to people.' Many visitors to a park need the meaning and the value of the park they are in brought closer to them. The artist-in-residence, turned artist interpreter, joined by a research scientist, turned scientist interpreter, offers, we think, an unparalleled opportunity to bring parks to people."

Because some parks have experimented with these kinds of activities, it is a good time to evaluate the role of the visitor center in park interpretation.

The function of a visitor center could be the subject of a profitable dialogue among DSC interpretive planners, HFC and park interpreters. Some parks are developing visitor participation programs that require unprogrammed space in the visitor center, which is seldom available. Expensive museum installations destined to remain for many years are justified in such instances as the new Colter Bay Indian Museum. In other locations short term exhibits scheduled for early replacement are more in order.

Although living history has had dramatic successes, there are almost limitless opportunities available in the presentation of historic houses. Research historians and preservation architects and the HFC curators set the stage. It is up to the park to bring it to life. Observed one historian:

> "A more lived-in look to our historical houses is needed desperately. Most of these houses are antique displays for the elite antiquarian. They should honestly, through clever arrangement, reflect life in early America, not furniture."

New communication techniques are finally making it possible to realize a long discussed NPS goal: providing information to visitors before they reach the parks. Yellowstone has pioneered use of radio to provide taped informational messages which approaching park visitors can pick up on their car radios. The same system is also used for interpretive messages within the park.

In November, 1972, Carl Degen, HFC, produced a 30-minute program on Great Smokies which was telecast by the Gatlinburg cable television station. It ranged from an interview on tree ecology with Art Stupka

to a description of park activities and services available the following day, presented by a park interpreter. This kind of program can reach 15,000 motel rooms in the Gatlinburg area, and a daily program is planned for the summer of 1973. It can provide the means not only of informing people what there is to see and do, but can convey the nature of resource problems and explain the need for requiring certain restrictions in visitor access. Eventually, cable systems will be linked together, and the ultimate possibilities for NPS utilization of cable television are limitless.

Cultural Diversity

Particularly in the interpretation of historical and cultural areas, there is a need to achieve a whole new level of sensitivity in presenting and conveying the contributions made by minority groups. It has been observed that visiting a national park is a middle class experience; it has also been pointed out that NPS interpretation often seems designed for middle class people who are descended from European ancestry. There is an obligation to reconsider, for example, the policy on exhibition of Indian burial and religious objects, as well as to re-examine the manner of how the Indian is treated in historical perspective.

Two students from the University of Arizona are now conducting a year-long study of interpretation in the United States and Canada. In a status report prepared by one of the students, she spoke to the need of NPS, in its interpretive programs, to achieve a greater degree of relevance, to the interests of young people and to the cultural legacy of minority groups.

> "One of the main problems associated with relevance is that of cultural diversity. Most parks just don't have it. I find nothing in the parks to appeal to me as the member of a minority. Historic parks are set aside to instill in us a pride of our heritage . . . as long as it came across from Europe. The heritage of those who met the colonists and gave them their land, of the blacks whose forefathers came chained in the holds of slave ships, of the Mexicans, of the Chinese, and many other minority groups - this heritage is largely ignored in most interpretive messages. There is a significant lack of Black and Indian interpreters, not because of discretionary hiring policies, but because, I believe, the parks have little to offer them, or their people."

An Inspiring Model

While the quality of the interpretive program depends upon the interpreter, the key to the success of the doctrine of local responsibility is the superintendent. He is the only person who can establish a climate of encouragement and support, which will both stimulate and guide the interpreter as he seeks, and occasionally fails, to develop a first rate program. Asked to give one recommendation to the Director for improving NPS interpretation, one superintendent replied:

> "Impress upon the superintendents the genuine concern of the National Park Service over the state of interpretation and insist on the proper balance of operations, even to the extent of adjusting priorities. I feel the superintendents hold the key. They control their own funds and 'do their own thing.' Those areas, and there are some, especially the smaller monuments, where the superintendent cares and is involved, have outstanding programs."

In terms of local responsibility, one can probably best conclude by observing that interpretation is not so much a collection of programs but an attitude, an all pervasive attitude shared by all employees, whether their duties are in maintenance, administration, protection or interpretation, an attitude that is expressed in every element of park operations. Credit Bill Jones, DSC, who articulates an inspiring model for interpretation in the parks:

> "It involves an expansion of role to include the entire visitor experience, with the interpretive theme of an area becoming the park philosophy of that area, controlling all phases of activity and development. Information, once and for all, becomes an interpretive function. Even law enforcement stems from the interpretive philosophy in order to insure a compatible overall experience. At the same time, interpretation provides a two-way avenue for the public to express itself and for the government to respond with action where appropriate, or to explain and educate. This is done through forums, seminars, off-site programs, and environmental education. By such devices, support is generated for more such programs, for the park itself, and, of course, ultimately for the National Park Service and the environment. This is the contribution from the grass roots - the parks. There would be similar contributions from the Harpers Ferry Center, Washington, and regional offices in providing editorial liaison at those levels, traveling exhibits, etc. The Denver Service Center would utilize interpretive planning concepts even more intimately and earlier in the master planning process than now."

FIVE

ORGANIZATION

There is a well known theory in government: "Organization is policy." One perceptive employee of the Western Regional Office pursued this line of reasoning to determine what emphasis NPS is giving to interpretation.

> "It is significant to note that in the new section on National Park Service Organization (dated March 30, 1972) of the Departmental Manual, there is no reference to interpretation in the organization chart nor is there any specific office to handle the interpretive function identified in the functional outline of the Washington Office. Where at the Washington level does this leave the control of interpretation as a major program of the Service? Would not interested parties outside of the Service wonder whether we really are in earnest about the importance of the NPS interpretive program when it does not even appear in the description of the Washington Office organization at the policy-making and national coordinating level?"

There is widespread concern throughout NPS that no identifiable office of interpretation exists at the Washington level. Asked in the Questionnaire "Are you satisfied that there is adequate policy direction of the interpretive programs from the Washington Office? the vote was "no," 493-384.

One of the first actions of this study was to meet with the members of the Office of Operations Evaluation to review the findings of the regional Operations Evaluation teams in the area of interpretation. The lack of an office on the Washington level responsible for direction of NPS interpretation was given as the single most widely encountered criticism of the present status of interpretation. At the last formal meeting of this study, at Grand Canyon, the members declared,

> "It is the opinion of many in the Service that the function of interpretation has almost been organized out of NPS. Let's organize interpretation back into the Service."

Asked for his evaluation of the direction being given to interpretation, the then Assistant Director for Field Operations reported:

> "We have just reviewed the role and function statements for executives in Washington, Region, etc. The word 'Interpretation' is really missing in areas of line and functional responsibilities. It is difficult to determine just who is primarily responsible at the Washington level."

The Good Old Days of Interpretation

"Like so many things in this life," one interpreter remarked philosophically, "the fortunes of interpretation in the National Park Service appear to have a strongly cyclic viability." Only a few years ago, the responsibility for interpretation was well identified on the Washington and regional levels. An Assistant Director for Interpretation advised the Director on all matters relating to interpretation and visitor services and was responsible for policy direction. A Regional Chief of Interpretation, with strong staff support, was his counterpart in the regional office and an effective communication link between the parks and the Washington Office.

Organizational changes made at that time were meant to strengthen the several units involved in interpretation and to clarify their relationships with other NPS operating levels. Because the Assistant Director for Interpretation had both line authority over the production staffs for publications, AV and museums, as well as staff responsibility to advise the Director on interpretation and visitor services in the regions and the field, the production units were established as a field service center at Harpers Ferry. Responsibility for visitor services was placed in the Division of Park Management, initially as one position, and the position of Assistant Director for Interpretation abolished. With the development of a program and staff for environmental education, this activity was combined with the visitor services responsibility in the Division of Park Management. Environmental education has had several organizational attachments during which time the actual responsibility for interpretation in the Washington Office has been, to say the least, confused. The regions and the field, obviously, do not know who, if anyone, is in charge.

The regional offices were restructured with similar impact upon the responsibility for interpretation. The office of the Regional Chief of Interpretation was abolished, the number of interpretive staff positions in the regional office substantially reduced, with interpretive and environmental specialists assigned to several operating elements.

As a result, responsibility for interpretation is seriously fragmented, difficult to identify at both the Washington and regional levels.

Production of interpretive programs and curatorial services are the responsibility of the Harpers Ferry Center, reporting through the Assistant Director for Service Center Operations to the Associate Director, Operations. Environmental Education is in the Division of Long Range Planning and New Program Development, reporting to the Associate Director, Professional Services. The Mather Center,

responsible for interpretive training, is in the Office of Personnel Management and Development, reporting to the Associate Director, Administration. Interpretive planning is the responsibility of the Denver Service Center.

Although there are some variations in regional office organization, the location of interpretive positions follow a similar pattern. There is an environmental specialist, or coordinator, under the Assistant Director, Cooperative Activities; an interpretive specialist under the Assistant Director, Operations; and generally an interpreter on the Operations Evaluation team. Asked the question "Has an office been designated in your regional office for handling communications between the park and the Harpers Ferry Center? the response of park interpreters was 74 "yes" and 85 "no," with 78 perplexed interpreters leaving the question blank or writing in "don't know." These results help explain the difficulty of establishing good lines of communication between the parks and HFC.

Environmental Education

With the establishment of the environmental education activity, NPS interpretation achieved a new dimension. The NEED and NESA programs involved most park interpreters. Emphasis upon environmental approaches and the use of the strands concept resulted in a broadening of the interpretive theme, gave park interpretive programs a broadened outlook, and stimulated new insights on park management practices.

Partly because NEED, the first environmental education project, had a separate funding basis, its administration also evolved into a separate organizational relationship. During the initial phase it was agreed, after considerable discussion, that the organizational title "Environmental Education," rather than "Interpretation," would be used to help identify the new program during its formulative period. Eventually, it was then decided, the function should be absorbed within interpretation. This decision has resulted in two schools of thought: one, that interpretation and environmental education should get together; and two, that they have never been apart.

To the extent confusion exists, it is of several kinds.

Philosophy

In some cases an environmental graft has been made on the park theme, or the park theme has been divided into an environmental and a traditional theme. The problem has been more severe in historical areas, where earnest attempts by historians to provide an environmental framework for the historical theme have sometimes had awkward results.

> "Historical areas contain a set of quite different resources and the artificial insertion of ecological material is not logical."

It is not intended to separate a historical park into a historical area and a nature study area. Nor, in national parks, should the total environment approach tend to produce a sameness in all park programs. There should be no interpretation that does not proceed directly from the park theme. As has been observed, people do not come a thousand miles to a national park to hear a lecture on water pollution.

The inevitable result has been some confusion within the Service over what constitutes an environmental interpretive program. Asked on the Questionnaire, "Do you believe there is uncertainty about what constitutes an appropriate amount and an appropriate philosophy for including 'environmental' emphasis in our interpretive programs?" the vote was "yes," 782-181. But the question itself, as Tommy Gilbert, Chief

of the Office of Environmental Interpretation, has pointed out, adds to the confusion, for one does not achieve a truly environmental approach merely by adding an appropriate amount of environmental substance until one gets "enough."

Commenting on Freeman Tilden's classic definition that interpretation is "An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through use of original objects, by first hand experience, and by illustrative media," Tommy suggests, "If the activity does reveal meanings and relationships within the context of broader concerns of life today, it is environmental interpretation."

Perhaps an attempt should be made, finally, to define the two terms.

Environmental Education

There are certain specific interpretive programs which have been developed by NPS, which are designed expressly for young people, which generally involve a working relationship with school systems and the school curriculum, and which may take place within the parks but are more likely to be school, rather than park, oriented. These are the environmental education programs of NPS - NEED, NESA, NEEL, and STEP.

Interpretation

Partly influenced by the development of the environmental education programs, partly resulting from previous, and continuing, efforts by interpreters to respond to the environmental/ecological movement, NPS interpretation has developed a vigorous environmental foundation on which its programs are based. Interpretation includes the environmental education programs. There should be no interpretation which does not meet the environmental test. It should therefore be redundant to speak of "environmental" interpretation.

Organization

The existing organizational alignments perpetuate the tendency to regard interpretation and environmental education as two separate programs. Interpretation and environmental education should be integrated organizationally as well as philosophically.

Program Priority

It has already been observed that, so far as the parks are concerned, the scope of the off site environmental education programs should be determined by the park superintendent. The real question of program priority

deals with the amount of NPS involvement in the school-related environmental education projects carried out by the Office of Environmental Education, and supported by environmental education specialist in the regional and other field offices. Originally, NPS launched NEED, and the subsequent programs, as its contribution on a pilot basis to environmental education in this country. It has been a distinguished contribution. These programs, as presently funded, seem most appropriate to the NPS responsibility to contribute to environmental quality.

The Mather Center

It had been anticipated that a review would be carried out, during the 1973 fiscal year, of the interpretive training needs of the National Park Service. Tommy Thomas, Supervisor of the Mather Training Center, who had been designated to carry out the review, generously agreed to postpone his project until the conclusion of this study of interpretation. It was his feeling that the results of the study of interpretation would be helpful in determining future interpretive training needs.

The Mather Center should play a key role in implementing the recommendations of this report. Hopefully, the report will lend weight to the need for a continued, and expanded program in the advanced training of interpreters. There is a substantial training need in the area of seasonal programs alone. NPS interpretation has reached a rather significant milestone with respectto philosophy, program priority, and organization. Communicating the role of interpretation to interpreters, and helping define the objectives of NPS interpretation, should be one of the primary functions of the Mather Center.

Interpretation and Research

There needs to be a considerably improved interchange between the park interpreters, HFC, and the offices responsible for conducting the research programs of NPS. In past years, when park interpreters did most of the research work of the Service, it was perhaps more accurate to say that interpretation was based upon research. Although there have been organizational changes, the concept is still wholly valid.

If park interpretive programs, and the products of HFC, are to proceed from the base of sound scholarship, a way must be found to establish better lines of communication. Some excellent results have been attained when interpreters and research people have worked together on new area and project development programs. Probably few research projects are initiated primarily to further interpretive needs, whether in historical or natural areas. If there has been a separation between research and interpretation, let the marriage bans be announced.

The Park Organization

As has been noted in a previous section, park organizations, insofar as interpretation is concerned, vary widely. Some are using the traditional model of a chief interpreter with line authority and others use variations of the I&RM and FOST concepts. The scattered development of cluster and state director offices, each with differing staff capabilities and therefore responsibilities for interpretation adds further models. The way in which the various levels of NPS have organized for interpretation seems to meet the mathematicians' definition of a random walk.

No recommendation is being made in this report with respect to I&RM and other park organizational concepts. It would be ill advised to attempt to reach conclusions about the total impact of I&RM, based only upon a study of interpretation. Resource management and visitor protection activities are equally affected, and have not been so studied. Probably they should. Organizational responses, such as I&RM, are in part receiving blame for the situation they are trying to correct. FOST has achieved many of its goals and is helping to build a strong body of interpretive technicians who are making an important contribution. In spite of much controversy over these concepts, certainly more so with I&RM, superintendents and interpreters have submitted endorsements.

It was the concensus at Grand Canyon that the park superintendent be allowed to determine the best arrangement of staff resources to fit his own situation. But at Grand Canyon, and throughout the study, there has been one persistent appeal: give the interpreter line authority over the interpretive program. There is near unanimous agreement with the superintendent who said:

> "I have not seen what I considered an effective - certainly not a creative - product where the professional interpreter is in a staff position to the unit manager. It is virtually impossible to correct weaknesses in interpretive techniques, improve faulty scheduling, or stimulate improved staff morale by proxy."

One Chief of I&RM spoke for this demand:

"I believe the single most frustrating condition in our present interpretive posture is the widespread transfer of program responsibility from trained interpreters to managers and administrators who, by definition, can give only diluted attention to an activity which requires more. This applies to retreaded former interpreters almost as much as to those managers and administrators who are not. An effective program requires a Chief Interpreter with line authority and responsibility for his product, in the same weight that effective

visitor protection and resource management requires a Chief with the necessary training, line authority and responsibility."

Just about the most telling criticism of the present organization, or lack of organization, for interpretation has been made on a number of occasions, mostly in the form of a question. If this report were generally accepted by the Director, to what office could he give the responsibility for implementation?

The answer seems obvious. Unless such an office is created, in both the Washington and regional offices, the recommendations of this report cannot effectively and on a continuing basis be carried out.

There are, and there should continue to be, organizational elements involved with interpretation which are located in different parts of the organization, reporting to different members of the Director's immediate staff. The Mather Training Center and the Harpers Ferry Center should continue in their present organizational alignment, with the environmental education responsibility moving to the program area of Operations.

What is needed by interpretation organizationally is an identifiable center of decision and authority, both at the regional and Washington level, with responsibility to insure that all interpretive activities are directed toward accomplishing the mission of NPS. Those environmental education programs which are still considered to be in the development stage, should remain with the Division of New Program Development until they have reached an operational phase. All other existing responsibilities of the Office of Environmental Interpretation should be moved to the program area of Operations.

The strengthening, in past year, of the supportive interpretive activities - training, production of publications, AV and exhibits, environmental education, and planning - has given interpretation a new dimension. What is most needed now is to devise ways of strengthening and supporting field interpretive services.

Essential to the success of such a program is the establishment of an office, at both the regional and Washington levels, responsible for identifying the mission of interpretation, developing Servicewide priorities, providing a coordinating focus for the several organizational units involved in interpretation, and perhaps most important, exercising watchful leadership over all matters essential to the development of a strong corps of talented and highly motivated interpreters.

"My experience tells me that what we need is not just more money or more manpower directed to the NPS 'interpretive program' but a vital new concern - yes, even a creative concern - directed toward what kind of person enters the interpretive and other ranks of the Service, how they will be trained, and how their careers will develop over the years. No small task."

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are, throughout this report, a number of suggestions and recommendations. Some are critical, of high priority; some are of lesser significance to the cause of interpretation. What is needed most is an identifiable decision-making office which can develop an action program for implementation of the report.

A few of the most critical needs have been identified in the recommendations below. These are the "pressure points." If they can be accomplished, interpretation will be on its way.

1. Affirm the importance and the urgency of strengthening NPS interpretation, refocusing priorities where necessary.

2. Establish an Office of Interpretation under the Associate Director, Operations, with responsibility for policy direction and coordination; transfer the operational elements of Environmental Interpretation to Operations; establish a counterpart Office of Interpretation in the regional offices.

3. Strengthen the recruiting procedures for bringing capable interpreters into the Service; reinforce the number of positions in the beginning interpretive grades; insure that interpreters have rewarding career opportunities within the field of interpretation.

4. Place responsibility for the quality and substance of the interpretive program with the park superintendent; establish as a staffing goal a professional interpreter in each park; give line authority over the interpretive program to the park interpreter.

5. Designate a demonstration interpretive park in each region, appropriately staffed, to serve as an experimental center for new interpretive approaches; as feasible, convene a meeting of interpreters in each region, to exchange ideas and to contribute to the implementation of this report.