



Interpretive Plan

For Concessioners Who Provide Guided Horseback Rides

Grand Teton National Park (NP) captures the imaginations of nearly four million visitors every year. Our visitors travel from all over the world to view wildlife, explore the Teton trails, and experience the mystique of the old west. As a wrangler, you have an opportunity to transport visitors back to another era when most travelers arrived in Jackson Hole on horseback. Horseback rides also provide a unique interpretive setting that you can use to share the natural resources and human history of Grand Teton NP with your guests. Without your help, visitors may never realize the depth of human history or the breadth of natural diversity found within this grand landscape.

As a park concession employee, you are required to provide for the safety of your guests. You also have the responsibility to share the resources of Grand Teton NP with your guests as they travel park trails on your guided horseback rides. This document provides you with safety and interpretive tips that will help you fulfill your responsibilities as wrangler who works for a park concessioner.

Trip Introductions

Guide Introduction and Trail Safety

A friendly introduction that includes your name and the name of company you work for is the first step in gaining the confidence of your guests. Safety messages should occur before visitors are introduced to their horse and include how to move around the horses while on the ground; how to control the horse while mounted; and how to communicate with the wrangler in the event of an emergency. Before visitors mount their horses, it is important to tell them what they need to bring (e.g., water, sunscreen, rain gear, sunglasses) so they are properly prepared for the ride.

Trip Orientation

The trip orientation should cover length of trip, trail conditions (e.g., water crossings, exposed/narrow trails, passing another group, etc.), and description of the route (e.g., places to take photos, snack stops, trails traveled, etc.). This overview of the ride will help nervous riders relax. If your rides originate outside of Grand Teton NP, we also ask that you mention to your guests when they enter the park.



Interpretation

Definition

Ham (1992) defines interpretation as “an approach to communication. Interpretation involves translating the technical language of a natural science or related field into terms and ideas that people who aren’t scientists can readily understand” (p. 3). Interpretation involves more than just sharing factual information with visitors. Effective interpretive horseback rides are organized, have a main idea, and are relevant to your audience.

Organization

Think of last time you walked into a movie late. If you are like most people, it took you a while to figure out what was going on. Who were the main characters? What was the plot? Once you figured out those details, you could relax and enjoy the movie . . . but then, one of the characters did something that did not fit with what you thought was going on. You searched back through your memory of what you had seen and tried to again make sense of the movie. This process takes a lot of effort. If you paid a lot of money to see the movie, you probably were willing to stay and figure out the plot. However, if you were watching a movie at home, you may have been less likely to stick with the movie and may have flipped the channel to a program that was easier to follow. In either case you would be considered a “non-captive audience.”

Non-Captive Audiences

Non-captive audiences are voluntary audiences that do not expect external

Through interpretation,
understanding.
Through understanding,
appreciation.
Through appreciation,
protection.

rewards and will switch attention if bored. Students in an academic class are “captive audiences.” They will make an effort to pay attention, even if bored, because the external reward (i.e., the grade) is important (Ham, 1992).

Guests on a horseback ride are non-captive audiences when it comes to listening to you. It is important to present your information in an organized fashion that requires little mental effort to figure out what is going on because your non-captive audiences will tune you out if you are too hard to follow. Leaving your guests with a better understanding of Grand Teton NP and providing them with opportunities to create emotional and/or intellectual connections to this place involves planning ahead for each tour with an organized presentation. The key components to an organized ride are a main idea, introduction, body, and conclusion.

Main Ideas

A horseback ride in the Tetons offers many interpretive subjects (e.g., mountains, animals, historic dude ranches). It may be tempting to toss out random bits of information along the way as you see one of these subjects. You can certainly use these subjects, but incorporate them into your pre-designed ride. Organization of your ideas will make your trip less work for your audience to follow and less likely that they will “flip the channel” to something that requires less mental effort. To provide rides that are effective in conveying your message and easy for your audience to follow, you need to have a main idea or “theme.”

Imagine a pearl necklace. Now imagine that necklace, but without the string. You no longer have a connected string of pearls, but rather a pile of loose pearls rolling in many different directions. Trips without a main idea are like the string of pearls without the string: bits of interesting information all rolling in different directions. Information rolling in many different directions is much like a movie without a plot and a constant change in the main characters—would you sit through a movie such as that? Themes can be as simple as, “Dude ranching played an important role in settling Jackson Hole” or a bit more descriptive: “Dude ranching helped transition the economic base of JH from farming and ranching to tourism, and this transition was partially responsible for the creation of Grand Teton NP.”

Themes help keep your program organized by providing a common thread throughout the many stops and conversations that occur during the ride.

Introductions

We already discussed the importance of guide and trip introductions. Just as those introductions are important for orienting your guests to the day’s activities, it is also important to introduce the “verbal” part of your tour. A good trip introduction creates interest in what you have to say and also orients guests to your theme.

Themes can easily be worked into your introduction. After your safety and trail orientation, you can introduce your theme. For example, “As we start down the trail, I want you to think about your trip to Jackson Hole. Where did you come from? What was your mode of transportation? How comfortable was the journey? Imagine that same trip in 1890. It would have been a several day journey simply to cross over Teton Pass. In 1890 there was no bridge over the Snake River so you would have to ford the river. How would you get across with your food, bedding, and livestock? For now, let go of the present and ride into the past and imagine your ‘new’ life in 1890.” Describing early frontier life and what it took to survive in Jackson Hole is great way to engage your clients in the cultural history of Grand Teton NP.

Body

The body of your trip is made up of the facts that support your main idea. A well developed body is organized and uses whatever facts, concepts, analogies, and examples are needed to make the information enjoyable, entertaining, meaningful, and relevant to your audience (Ham, 1992). Another important part of the body is various resource messages, such as keeping a safe distance from wildlife (a minimum of 100 yards) and not feeding the wildlife by leaving trash out, etc. You can find details on the wildlife in Grand Teton NP and other information that will help you build the body of your program at: www.nps.gov/grte/parkmgmt/brguide.htm

Conclusion

Your conclusion should reinforce your theme. The conclusion also provides a verbal clue that the trip is over. Trip conclusions are your chance to summarize your main points into a package that visitors can take home and share with friends and family members who ask, “What did you talk about on your horseback ride in Grand Teton NP?” The conclusion is also a great time to mention the importance of protected areas in ensuring that we, and future generations, will continue to have recreational and educational experiences in amazing places such as Grand Teton NP.

1. Select your general topic and use it to complete the following sentence:

"Generally, my tour is about put your topic here (e.g., dude ranching)."

2. State your topic in more specific terms and complete the following sentence:

"Specifically, I want to tell my audience about put your specific topic here (e.g., the history of dude ranching in Jackson Hole)."

3. Now, express your theme by completing the following sentence:

"After my horseback ride, I want my audience to understand that put your theme here (e.g., "Dude ranching helped transition the economic base of JH from farming and ranching to tourism, and this transition was partially responsible for the creation of Grand Teton NP)."

*Text from Ham, 1992

A good time to present your conclusion is about five to ten minutes before returning to the corral because you still have the attention of your audience. Once guests arrive back at the corral, they are more concerned with getting off the horse than listening to your conclusion.

Park Themes

Grand Teton NP has a list of primary interpretive themes (see the "Grand Teton NP Interpretive Themes" table on page 4). These themes are used to develop park interpretive rides. You can use these themes to develop organized and thematic rides that will help your guests connect to, and understand, the amazing resources of the Grand Teton NP. Programs that are understood by audience members are more enjoyable and can increase visitor satisfaction with your ride.

Teachable Moments

A horseback ride offers many opportunities for teachable moments that may not be directly tied to your theme, but are extraordinary chance encounters that warrant attention. For example, your group may spot a bear feasting on huckleberries. This chance encounter can be folded back into a cultural history theme about the major periods of human habitation. Bears enjoy huckleberries as did the Native Americans who entered this valley seasonally to gather plants materials such as huckleberries. They would dry huckleberries and store them for the winter. Themes serve as organizational guides and can be complimented with teachable moments.

The Interpretive Setting: On the back of a horse

Horseback rides provide unique challenges for interpretation because there are limited opportunities to stop and chat with the entire group. A few suggestions to deal with these challenges are: know your route well enough to make scheduled stops where space allows, talk to the entire group while moving up or down switchbacks, gather the group together in a line while you leave the trail and face the group, and

have guests pass information down the line of riders like a game of telephone.

Tips to Engage Your Audience

Relevance

Relevant information is new facts or stories that connect with information that is familiar or has "context" for your guests. Relevant information is easier to understand because we relate to it in the context of something else we already know. Information that is not relevant or has no context is difficult to follow and understand; it is meaningless, much like a movie with a constant change of characters and no plot. The art of interpretation is finding ways to facilitate connections between the new information you present on your rides and the familiar information that is floating around in the brains of your guests.

Interpretive Tricks

The interpretive tricks listed below can help you make your information relevant and create a "learner friendly" environment that is more engaging and less work for your non-captive audiences.

*Use foreshadowing. Foreshadowing can be used to peak curiosity and the interest of your guests. For example, "Your first impression of the Teton mountains may have been one of awe, but for many pioneers, their first vignettes of the mountains may have instilled dread and fear. As we head down the trail we will be discussing the emotional and physical fortitude the early pioneers needed to settle this formidable landscape."

*Make a joke. Humor can break nervous tension when visitors, for example, are nervous about their first horseback ride. Humor can be a very effective tool for engaging your audience, but it should be used with caution because what one person thinks is funny can be very offensive to another person.

*Have a positive attitude. If you look like you are relaxed and having fun, your guests will take that cue from you and relax and enjoy the trip.

LNT Principles Applicable to Horseback Rides

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
(e.g., bring water, sunscreen, etc.)
 2. Travel on Durable Surfaces
(e.g., established trails)
 3. Leave What You Find
(e.g., no picking wildflowers)
 4. Respect Wildlife
(e.g., keep a football field of distance from large animals)
 5. Be Considerate of Other Visitors
(e.g., hikers and other stock users)
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*Use personification. "What might moose say to us if they could talk about their diet of willows and aquatic vegetation?"

*Self-referencing or getting your clients to think about themselves and their experiences draws your guests into what you are saying because it makes the information personally relevant. This also helps individuals remember new facts because they can attach the new information to something familiar. "Think of the last time you . . ." or "Have you ever . . ." are effective self-referencing questions.

*Comparisons can enhance learning because they allow you to bridge the familiar with the unfamiliar. "Picking a trail in the mountains is like finding the right freeway in Los Angeles; you have to keep your eyes open for important landmarks and signs."

Non-Verbal Communication

Interpretation includes more than just talking. We communicate through the signs we post at our offices, pamphlets we handout, and most strongly through our actions. For example, if, while riding down the trail you see a moose, you turn and look at your clients with a finger to your lips and raised eyebrows while gesturing toward the animal, your guests will know there is something special to look at. You do not need to say anything to convey your excitement.

While guiding guests, you need to be aware of your actions, which can often speak louder than words. For example, if you toss trash (even organic waste like an apple core) into the bushes after a short stop on the trail, clients will assume that is correct behavior and also toss trash into the bushes.

Leave No Trace

Knowing the communication power of our actions, it is important that concession employees practice Leave No Trace Ethics while on the trails or in the backcountry –on and off duty. We all need to work together to minimize our impacts on the

resources so that we and future generations can continue to enjoy the park's resources for many years to come.

Final Thoughts

This rugged landscape can mean many things to many people. Some may focus on the grandeur of the snowcapped mountains while others may sympathize with the early pioneers who struggled to grow crops and raise cattle in this rocky valley. Visitors may also connect with the mystique of the old west and the rich dude ranching legacy of Jackson Hole.

We rely on you to share the natural, cultural, and recreational resources of Grand Teton NP with your guests. If we miss opportunities to inspire visitors to care for and about protected resources, like those found in Grand Teton NP, we jeopardize the future of wild places for generations yet to come. Through an organized and thoughtful approach to your guided horseback rides, you can effectively share the grandeur, hardship, and mystique of Grand Teton NP with your guests.

References and Suggested Reads

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Grand Teton NP Interpretive Themes

1. The dramatic scenery of the Teton Range and Jackson Hole comes from fault block mountain building and carving by glaciers and other erosive forces.
2. Grand Teton NP, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway, and Yellowstone NP comprise the heart of one of the largest, most intact temperate ecosystems remaining in the world.
3. Grand Teton NP provides a diversity of habitats for a variety of plant and animal species that interact as a unit rather than as individuals.
4. Visitors bear responsibility for, as well as ownership of, public lands such as Grand Teton NP, and must strive for a balance between resource preservation and use.