



Interpretive Plan

For Concessioners Who Provide Guided Mountain Climbing Services

There are many ways for visitors to experience the splendor of Grand Teton National Park (NP). Hiking the many miles of Teton trails satisfies and inspires a multitude of park visitors. The chance glimpse of a black bear cub or a relaxing lunch stop at a scenic vista recharges many souls. However, some visitors seek more than a demanding trail; they want to test their mountaineering skills and challenge themselves to reach the loftiest peaks in Jackson Hole. As mountains guides, you help visitors test their mountaineering adeptness and experience first hand the rugged beauty of these mountains—a beauty that is enhanced through the adventure and challenge of mountaineering.

While guiding clients up the high peaks of the Teton Range, you have the opportunity and responsibility to share the cultural and natural history of Grand Teton NP and educate your guests about proper backcountry etiquette. This document provides you with park and interpretive information that will help you fulfill your responsibility to provide safe and enjoyable mountaineering experiences in Grand Teton NP.

Safety

Safety is the most important element of a guided mountaineering trip. As skilled mountaineers, you know safe climbing practices and you are expected to adhere to safe work practices while guiding clients. Attention to safety should always take precedence over any other activity including, but not limited to, taking photographs, providing interpretive information, and wildlife viewing.

Trip Introductions

Guide and Guest Introductions

A friendly introduction that includes your name, orientation to Grand Teton NP and to the trip (e.g., physical demands of the approach and the climb, personal gear needed, expected weather, contingency plans, etc.) is the first step in building a rapport with your clients. Sharing a bit about yourself, your climbing experience, and your company helps build trust and creates a friendly atmosphere for the rest of the trip. Ask your clients about their interests, previous climbing experience, and knowledge of the local area. This chat

helps you tailor your interpretation to the interests and personal experiences of your clients. Remembering and using your clients' names builds rapport and gains their respect.

Trail Map Introductions

Often times when visitors sign up for a trip, the place names of trails, camping zones, and climbing routes may have little meaning. While some visitors may be very familiar with trip routes, topography, and camping zones, the majority of visitors will be unfamiliar with the area. To help visitors relax, take a few moments at the office to orient visitors to the trip using a park map. Maps are a useful interpretive tool because, when combined with the verbal description (i.e., we will gain 2000 feet in 5 miles), you address both visual and auditory learners.

Addressing questions relating to basic human needs (e.g., food, water, restrooms) through an orientation before heading down the trail will help visitors relax. Also, addressing proper human waste disposal at this time will help novice hikers avoid the uncomfortable question, "I have to go, but where is the bathroom?" Providing information such as miles covered, elevation gained, difficulty of a climbing route, hiking pace, and breaks before heading down the trail will help visitors feel more at ease and develop realistic trip expectations. When visitors know their basic needs will be met, they can move beyond worrying about meeting their basic needs and concentrate on the more enjoyable elements of the trip, like soaking in the view from the top of the Grand Teton.



“The purpose of interpretation is to stimulate the reader or hearer toward a desire to widen his horizon of interests and knowledge, and to gain an understanding of the greater truths that lie behind any statements of fact.”

-Freeman Tilden

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 trips 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 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 guided climbing trips are non-captive audiences, and they won’t spend a lot of time and effort to follow an unorganized trip. 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 program are a main idea, introduction, body, and conclusion.

Main Ideas

A guided climb in the Tetons offers many

interpretive subjects (e.g., geology, peak names, animals, plants, etc.). It may be tempting to toss out random bits of information along the way as you see one of these subjects. However, 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 trips 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, “The Teton Range occupies a special place in the history of American climbing” or a bit more descriptive, “From its controversial beginnings over the first party to summit the Grand, to its popularity today, mountaineering in the Teton Range has played, and continues to play an important role in the development of American climbing.”

There are many topics that lend themselves to “mountaineering interpretation.” For example, the history of mountaineering sites in the Teton Range is a great way to connect visitors with the rich tradition of exploring this landscape with the activity they are pursuing. Describing the controversy over who should be credited with the first ascent of the Grand is another way to engage your clients in the mountaineering history of Grand Teton NP.

Introductions

We already discussed the importance of guide, guest, 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 trip. A good program introduction creates interest in what you have to say and also orients guests to your theme.

Themes can easily be worked into the first few minutes down the trail. For example, to introduce a geology theme you could say, “As we start down the trail, I want you to look carefully at the different colors of rock you see in the mountains. The black rock we see between the Grand Teton

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

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

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 mountaineering in the Tetons)."

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

"After my climbing trip, I want my audience to understand that put your theme here (e.g., "from its controversial beginnings over the first party to summit the Grand to its popularity today, the Teton Range occupies a special place in the history of American climbing)."

*Text from Ham, 1992

and Tepee Pillar is diabase and the lighter colored rocks around it are granite and gneiss. Today we will be chatting about the different types of rocks that make up the Tetons and how these rocks influence climbing in the Tetons."

Body

The body of your program 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 your distance from wildlife (a minimum of 100 yards) and Leave No Trace backcountry etiquette. 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

It is quite common to cover more than one subject while guiding a trip. Maybe your clients are interested in plants, animals, and geology. Think about the abovementioned string of pearls. Now, instead of a single strand of pearls, imagine a pearl necklace with multiple strands. Geology can be one strand, animals can be another, and plants yet another. The idea is to keep these multiple subjects linked to themselves and ultimately to each other to present one cohesive idea. Your conclusion should reinforce your theme and provide you the opportunity to clasp your multiple-strand pearl necklace and send your clients home with a packaged idea that they will remember each time they reflect on their Teton climbing memories.

The conclusion also provides a verbal clue that the trip is over, and it is a great time to mention the importance of protected areas, such as Grand Teton NP, in ensuring that we, and future generations, will continue to have recreational and educational experiences in amazing places such as Grand Teton NP.

Teachable Moments

A climbing trip 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 in Jackson Hole. 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.

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 programs. You can use these themes to develop organized and thematic trips that will help your guests connect to, and understand, the amazing resources of Grand Teton NP. Interpretive information that is understood by audience members is more enjoyable and can increase visitor satisfaction with your guided climbing trips.

The Interpretive Setting: On the trail and rope

Guided climbing trips provide unique challenges for interpretation because there are many things that occupy your attention (e.g., safety). A few suggestions to deal with this challenging interpretive setting: talk to the entire group during a rest break, weave in bits of information while explaining a climbing route; or explain the importance of practicing LNT in the fragile alpine environment while in camp. With a little creative energy you can enhance your interpretation and encourage stewardship of park resources through facilitating meaningful and memorable park experiences—the ultimate goal of interpretation.

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

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 (Ham, 1992). 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 climbing trips and the familiar information that is floating around in the brains of your guests. One way to find out what is relevant to your guests is through chit chat at the beginning of the hike. You can use this information to customize your climbing trip and present new information in a way that will connect to something that is familiar to your guests.

Interpretive Tricks

Interpretation facilitates the link between the interests and experiences of your audience and the meanings and significance of the resources. The interpretive tricks below will help you create opportunities for your clients to form a connection between the resources (e.g., wildlife, Teton mountaineering history, geology) you are interpreting and the interests of your visitors. When connections are successfully created, visitors walk away with a better understanding and appreciation of Grand Teton NP and the resources that are protected within the park boundaries.

*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.

*Use questions to focus attention on a specific object. For example, “Everyone, look up at the black dike on the Middle Teton, does it look like the same as the rock we saw between the Grand Teton and Tepee Pillar? Both of these black lines are made up of diabase.”

*Use foreshadowing. After you have focused everyone’s attention on the black rock between the Grand Teton and Tepee Pillar you can use foreshadowing to peak curiosity and interest. “We will see this rock—diabase— again. I want you to look closely at the black dike to see if it recessed or protruding. I will explain the importance of reading rock features such as that dike in determining what type of rock surrounds the diabase dikes and how rock types influences climbing in the Tetons.” Foreshadowing is an important tool because it can be used to create a sense of anticipation just like suspenseful music in a scary movie that hints danger lurks for the unsuspecting.

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

*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.

*Use a contrived situation. “If Congress had not established Grand Teton NP in 1950, what would this view look like today?”

*Use visual aids such as pictures and maps. Use a route map to explain the route and difficulty of the climb. Photos can also be used to illustrate interpretive points such as the differences between a pika and a marmot. Pictures help visual learners understand the verbal message. Pictures are lightweight and can be stored at base camp. Laminated visual aids to make them more durable.

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.

LNT Principles Applicable to Guided Climbing Trips

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
(e.g., bring water, appropriate gear, etc.)
 2. Leave What You Find
(e.g., leaving artifacts where you find them)
 3. Respect Wildlife
(e.g., keep a football field of distance from large animals)
 4. Be Considerate of Other Visitors
(e.g., let nature sounds prevail and avoid making loud noises)
 5. Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
(e.g., established trails and campsites)
 6. Dispose of Waste Properly
(e.g., pack it in, pack it out)
 7. Dispose of Human Waste Properly
(e.g., use WAG bags in the alpine environment)
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*Make a joke. Humor can break nervous tension when clients, for example, are nervous about their first free rappel. 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.

Non-Verbal Communication

Interpretation includes more than just oral communication. We communicate through the signs we post at our offices, pamphlets we hand out, and most importantly through our actions. For example, if you see a moose while walking down the trail, 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. Describing a flower by pointing rather than picking is a simple way to demonstrate leaving what you find where you found it.

Leave No Trace

Knowing the communication power of our actions, it is important that concession employees practice Leave No Trace while 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.

Why Share these Resources?

This rugged landscape can mean many things to many people. Some may focus on the grandeur of the snowcapped mountains while others may marvel at the diversity of wildlife. We rely on you to share the natural, cultural, and recreational resources of Grand Teton NP with your clients. 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 mountaineering trips, you can share the wildlife, geology, scenic vistas, as well as the adventure and challenge of mountaineering with your clients.

Final Thoughts

The alpine environment in which you work is a hidden treasure that the majority of Grand Teton NP visitors do not experience. Sharing this amazing resource with your intrepid clients can provide the spark to a life-long commitment to the preservation of wild places. We rely on guides, like yourself, to help us reach our lofty goal of inspiring visitors to care for and about this amazing place.

References and Suggested Reads

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