



Interpretive Plan

For Guides Who Provide Road-based Tours in Grand Teton NP

Grand Teton National Park (NP) protects a striking and unique mountain landscape. This landscape is complemented by a diversity of animal and plant life as well as a rich human history that spans more than 10,000 years. During your road-based tours of Grand Teton NP, guests have an opportunity to see a large swath of this diverse ecosystem, and without your help, guests may never understand the complexity, interconnectivity and importance of this grand landscape.

As an employee of a Grand Teton NP commercial use permittee, 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 you tour the park roads. This document provides you with safety and interpretive tips that will help you fulfill your responsibilities as a road-based tour guide in Grand Teton NP.

Safety

Seatbelts

Safety is the most important element of a road-based tour. Seat belt use in the vehicle is a major safety concern when driving in the park. The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) are the federal laws enforced in national parks (i.e., justification for tickets). CFR §4.15 states, "Each operator and passenger occupying any seating position of a motor vehicle in a park area will have a safety belt or child restraint system properly fastened at all times when the vehicle is in motion." To avoid feeling like the bad guy, you can approach the seatbelt issue by saying, "The Park Service requires us" or "It is federal law, so please use your seatbelt."

Driving

Another safety concern is safe driving. CFR §4.22 states, "Operating a motor vehicle without due care or at a speed greater than that which is reasonable and prudent considering wildlife, traffic, weather, road and light conditions and road character . . . [is prohibited]." Remember to always wear your seatbelt and remind guests to use their seatbelts; drive at or below the posted speed limit depending on weather conditions; watch for animals on the road, especially in the evening and morning.



Wildlife Viewing

As a road-based guide, you have many opportunities to view wildlife. When engaged in this activity from the road, safety will take precedence over any wildlife viewing opportunity. A safe wildlife watching situation includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Move vehicle completely out of the traffic lane; using designated pullouts is preferred
- Do not create dangerous driving situations for other drivers (e.g., stopping on a blind corner)
- Do not disturb the wildlife
- Maintain a distance of at least 100 yards (a football field) from large animals
- Do not feed, approach, or chase wildlife

Introductions

Guide, Guest, and Trip Introductions

A friendly introduction that includes your name, the name of the company you work for, where you are from, and how long you have been guiding in the valley is a great way to break the ice within the first few minutes of a tour. You may also want to include self-introductions of each of the guests. Self-introductions (i.e., each guest says his/her name, where he/she is from, and what he/she wants to see on the tour) provide you with an opportunity to learn your clients' names and something about each of them. These introductions will also help you customize your trip by giving you the opportunity to learn about the interests of your guests and gain an understanding of their expectations for the trip.

Road Map Introductions

These introductions are also a great time to verbally describe and show your guests the tour itinerary on a park map. Pointing out potential wildlife viewing stops,

“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

visitor centers, restroom breaks, and other anticipated stops will help visitors relax because they will know when and where their basic needs will be met (e.g., restroom breaks) and will be able to formulate realistic expectations of the tour. Maps are a useful tool because, when combined with a verbal description (i.e., it will be a 20 minute drive from Jackson to Jenny Lake), you address both visual and auditory learners.

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 tours are organized, have a main idea, and are relevant to your audience.

Organization

Think of the last time you walked into a movie late. If you are like most people, it took you a while to figure out what is 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 once more to 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 a road-based tour are non-captive audiences, and they won’t spend a lot of time or effort to follow an unorganized tour. It is important to present your information in an organized fashion that requires little mental effort

because your non-captive audience will tune 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 preparing an organized presentation. The key components to an organized presentation are a main idea, introduction, body, and conclusion.

Main Ideas

A drive around Grand Teton NP offers many interpretive subjects (e.g., mountains, animals, plants, and historic buildings). 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 draw in your audience and make it less likely that they will “flip the channel” to something that requires less mental effort. To provide tours 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, “Grand Teton NP is a great place for viewing wildlife” or a bit more descriptive: “Grand Teton NP is a great place for viewing wildlife, and the abundant wildlife is what brought many of the first people to the valley.” Themes help keep your program organized by providing a common thread throughout the many stops and conversations that occur during your tour.

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 tour. A good tour introduction creates interest in what you have to say and also orients guests to your theme.

Themes can easily be worked into your introduction. During the trip introduction you can use a map of Grand Teton NP to show the size of the park, the trip route,

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

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

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 formation of the Tetons)."

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

"After my road-based tour, I want my audience to understand that uplift built the Tetons and then glacial erosion carved the range into the dramatic peaks and low valleys that we see today."

*Text from Ham, 1992

and introduce a wildlife theme. For example, "Grand Teton NP is a great place for viewing wildlife. Today we may see elk, moose, deer, and bison as well as many birds. As we tour the park, I will be sharing information about these animals and the important role the wildlife played in settling Jackson Hole."

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 "Keep your distance from wildlife" (a minimum of 100 yards) and "Do not feed the wildlife by leaving trash out." 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 during a tour. 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. 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 tour of the Tetons.

The conclusion also provides a verbal clue that the trip is over. It is also 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.

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 tours 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 tour.

Teachable Moments

A road-based tour 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 beaver at the Oxbow. This chance encounter can be folded back into a cultural history theme about the important role wildlife played in drawing people in to Jackson Hole (e.g., beavers drew mountain men to the valley). Themes serve as organizational guides and can be complimented with teachable moments.

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 float 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 tour. You can use this information to customize your tour and present new information in a way that will connect to something that is familiar to your guests.

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

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, mountain building, pioneer history) 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.

*Use questions to focus attention on a specific object. For example, "Everyone look at the mountains. Can anyone guess why there are no foothills on this side of the Tetons?" That line of questioning can lead into a discussion about the geologic formation of the Tetons and why this mountainous landscape is so striking.

*Use foreshadowing. After you have focused everyone's attention on the mountains, you can use foreshadowing to peak curiosity and interest. For example, "At our next stop, we are going to see evidence of the next process— after uplift—that continued to shape these mountains. This process carved these U-shaped valleys and left a watery necklace around the base of the mountains (i.e., the seven glacial lakes such as Jenny)."

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

*Use personification. "What might moose say to us if they could talk about their winter experiences in Grand Teton NP?"

*Use pictures. Verbally describing mountain uplift or glacial movement is difficult. Use pictures when describing complex processes or making comparisons such as the size difference between wolf and coyote tracks. In situations such as these, pictures are worth a thousand words, especially for visual learners.

*Make a joke. Humor may also be used to help lighten the mood. 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.

Why Do We Do This?

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 road-based tours, you can share the complexity, interconnectivity and importance of this grand landscape with your clients. We rely on guides, like yourself, to help us reach our lofty goal of inspiring visitors to care for and about the amazing natural and cultural resources in Grand Teton NP.

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.