



Interpretive Writing Anchor

Product # 230-14

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Park: Grand Canyon NP

What is an anchor product?

- *An example of one type of successful product*
- *A product that has met the certification standards*
- *product that may be used as an example to aid you in learning, coaching, or instructing others in pursuit of professional interpretive development in this competency area*

What an anchor product is not:

- *Perfect*
- *The only way a product should be delivered*
- *Reviewed for subject matter accuracy or appropriateness, or for delivery mechanics or style*

The certifiers have identified that this product successfully meets certification standards by demonstrating that it:

- **creates "an opportunity for the audience to form their own intellectual and emotional connections with the meanings/significance inherent in the resource"**
 - *This article is successful in creating the opportunity for the reader to form intellectual and emotional connections to the aspen grove by providing both factual and reflective insights into its potential meanings. Opportunities for intellectual understanding were offered through the descriptions of how the aspen grove might have come to exist and survive in this location. Emotional possibilities were provided through the use of universal concepts such as inspiration, time, mystery, discovery and survival. Instead of telling the reader what to think, the article creates an invitation to explore the grove through the author's eyes.*
- **Provides "a clear focus for the audience's connection with the resource by demonstrating the cohesive development of a relevant idea or ideas, rather than relying primarily on a recital of a chronological narrative or a series of related facts"**
 - *The product also demonstrated the cohesive development of several ideas relevant to both the audience and the park: The aspen grove provides a special "sense of place." The aspen grove represents a broad diversity of meanings and can be valued in many different ways. The aspen grove represents why preservation is so important.*



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Intended Audience Statement:

This article is intended for a park publication called "Nature Notes." The audience for "Nature Notes" is park staff and cooperating association members.

The Search

Aspens along the South Rim? About 8 years ago when I began work as a park ranger I first heard the rumor. I was very skeptical. Was this the Park Service's version of the snipe hunt, the initiation of the greenhorns by sending them looking for some nonexistent rarity? Why was I skeptical? A number of books indicated that aspens grew only on the North Rim, ten miles across the canyon and 1,000 feet higher in elevation. In addition, the South Rim directions were always vague. "Oh, they're right along the rim in a little gully between Grandview and Moran Points. You can't miss them." I remained skeptical until I met Jake Garrity. Not only did he have a passionate belief in the existence of the hidden grove but he seemed genuinely piqued by my skepticism. So my search began, albeit with doubt.

After four or five exploratory hikes I finally located the grove in 1993. It was a clear July morning with blue sky and just a few white puffs of clouds to the north. As I made my way around a thick stand of mature spruce trees right at the rim's edge, I looked down into a gully and there were the unmistakable green, quaking, aspen leaves. At first the only thing I could do was sit on the gully's edge and just stare down in awe at the little grove below me. It seemed like I had walked into the unrealness and mystery of a Thomas Cole painting. Every tree, every plant seemed to be in the exact place where it belonged. Not even one blade of grass seemed to be out of place. At first the scene seemed totally quiet. Yet each gentle breeze brought the very slightest rustle of aspen leaves --- nature's most gentle snare drum. A more sturdy gust of wind left the gully filled with the sound of applause.

I came back time after time to savor the beauty of the aspen grove. I was drawn to the grove but knew not why. I was content to be a contemplative observer. My visits included the starkness of winter as well as golds and oranges and yellows of the autumn colors. I was content not to analyze or dissect. I was still trying to deal with the seeming unrealness of the place. Not only were there trees that belonged on the North Rim but around the grove I often saw Clark's nutcrackers and pinedrops, a bird and a plant which are associated with the North Rim.

I know, I was one of the lucky few for that aspen grove became more and more special to me. What were the forces that pulled me there? On an intellectual level I knew that the solitude, the silence and the primeval wilderness character drew me there. But I could not explain all of the grove's attraction. After a time I realized that I must accept the aspen grove as a place of ineffableness --- a place beyond expression, a place of inspiration, a place that touches one's very soul. I knew that this grove had been visited by Havasupai and Hopi visitors. Was I feeling something akin to what those early Native American visitors to the grove felt? "The groves were God's first temples," said William Cullen Bryant in his [Forest Hymn](#).

Eventually I began to explore the immediate area. The aspen grove consisted of about 60 trees scattered over about 2,000 square feet. They were located at the bottom of a 70-foot deep unnamed gully. Many of the trees appeared to be connected by sucker roots --- each a clone of all the trees in the grove. The gully emptied directly into the canyon. The upper edges of the ravine were ringed by a thick stand of Ponderosa pine, Gambel oak and Douglas fir. As the tallest aspens were slightly over 50 feet tall, the tops as well as the bottoms of the trees could be seen from the gully's edge. The tree trunks varied in diameter from two to 14 inches. Aspen may grow to over 100 years old but they are notoriously difficult to age accurately. The larger trees were doubtlessly older than 50 years. As the gully is north-facing it receives subdued sunlight and thus a cooler and moister microclimate for these "North Rim visitors."

But, wait. Are these aspens visitors from the North Rim? As this grove is within walking distance of the once-flourishing Grandview hotel did someone deliberately plant them? Or do these aspens date to a far earlier time?

As the park has no detailed scientific studies of the grove I sought other clues. One of the few clues we have is a 1930s Nature Notes article by Donald Edward McHenry. His description of the grove varies little with the grove we observe today --- except for one thing. McHenry noted a "sturdy" aspen specimen carved with "a Cupid's dart through a heart, together with the date 'August 13, 1891.'" As mining and hotel activity around Grandview Point did not begin until the 1890s one could logically assume that the aspen grove predates Anglo activities. So where did the aspens come from?

Much evidence points to the belief that this grove is a remnant, a relict of a time long ago when the climate was cooler throughout the canyon and aspen may have grown throughout the South Rim. Many experts point out that trees similar to aspen "appear to have flourished throughout western North America since middle Miocene time, almost 15 million years ago!" So the trees I observe today may be clones of trees that were in that very same location thousands or millions of years ago!

The thought of connecting with this living organism that may be thousands or even millions of years old exhilarates me. That thought touches my very soul, my spirituality. That quality, the potential for nature to inspire, to transcend everyday life offers itself to all that want to rise above the seeming chaos of their routine lives. I am reminded that this noble value, to preserve the natural for the inspiration of all, is a fundamental component of the National Park System mission. All people need a place to reflect.

Ecologists define a relict as an organism "of an earlier time surviving in an environment that has undergone considerable change." To survive that organism must remain unshakable in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. Perhaps this is the lesson of the aspen grove: we as supporters of the National Park System need to be unshakable, I dare say passionate, in our support of the Park's commitment to preservation.

If you want to visit the aspen grove, you can't miss it. It's right along the rim between Grandview and Moran Points.