The Land Speaks:

Organizing and Running an Interpretation System

By Yorke Edwards

With an Appendix by V.E.F. Solman

THE NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

From time to time The National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada (NPPAC) publishes books and reports on special issues or problems of importance to national parks and related reserves. Past publications have dealt with Gatineau Parks, Kluane National Park, Point Pelee National Park and Outdoor Education in Ontario. This booklet on the significance and management of interpretation programs is concerned with the crucial issue of how the message of parks and the land is communicated to all of us. It will be of interest to those involved in interpretation from the field to administrative levels, to students of interpretation, and to those benefitting from interpretation. While the number of articles on this subject has been increasing, especially since the publication of the journal *Interpretation Canada,* this booklet represents the first more comprehensive treatment of the subject to be published in Canada. The authors, Yorke Edwards, Director of the British Columbia Provincial Museum, and Victor Solman are well known to people concerned about the Canadian environment. The National and Provincial Parks Association takes pleasure in publishing this booklet in the interests of better interpretation everywhere in this country. The ideas and views expressed are, however, those of the authors and not necessarily those of the NPPAC. The Association wishes to acknowledge the generous grant of Mrs. Arthur T. Henderson which has made possible the publication of this and other NPPAC booklets. For more information on the Association, its objectives and membership rates please consult the back cover of this publication.

Robin Fraser
Past President

John Marsh
President

ISBN 0-920570-07-0
Printed by Golden Star Publishing, Golden, B.C.

Second Edition — 1980

The Land Speaks:

Organizing and Running an Interpretation System

By Yorke Edwards,
with an appendix by V. E. F. Solman

The National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada
Toronto
1979

Contents

Preface

This booklet is not so much for interpreters as it is for those concerned with the administration of interpretation. As such it deals with problems and their possible solutions, as well as with a basic examination of what interpretation is, and what it might be.

I decided to write such a booklet in 1972 while driving along the north shore of Lake Superior. That inspiring landscape moved me to complete a task that was then only half done. While working with the Canadian Wildlife Service in Ottawa on a project aimed at interpreting Canada to Canadians through a coast to coast chain of Wildlife Centres, I became aware of the administrative hazards confronting such a far-flung program. A study to identify the pitfalls was terminated short of organizing and reporting conclusions when I left the Service to return to western Canada. It was when I returned "home" that those wild Precambrian shores moved me to the thought that what I had discovered might in a small way help others to know the Canada that I knew. I decided to finish the project.

Its completion has been a prolonged process as it was ignored for periods of time for most of the reasons imaginable for a spare time project. It has no doubt suffered from its slow construction, but what I wanted to say I have said, and I hope that sometimes it offers interesting reading.

At all times the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada has been most encouraging; and has paid all expenses.

Through the years many people have helped me, and no doubt many ideas presented here were theirs before they became mine too. Among these people are those who helped by reviewing this report before my final revision. For this willing work beyond the call of friendship, I thank: Bill Barkley, Canadian Wildlife Service, Ottawa; Jesse Grove, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina; Kerry Joy and Ted Underhill, Parks Branch, Victoria, British Columbia; Gordon Nelson, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario; and Gavin Henderson, Terry Green and Carol Bailey, National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada, Toronto. They helped with generous advice, but all shortcomings, omissions and errors remain the sole property of the author.

Victoria, British Columbia
January 23, 1975.

Introduction

Introduction

Homo sapiens is a brainy animal, and one of the results of this anatomical specialization is man's need to understand what he sees. While it is true that many a good brain idles constantly because it has not been stimulated, now as never before people are taking an interest in the natural world of which man is part. This new and intensified mass interest is partly the result of formal education, but in North America at least, it is also partly the result of people being introduced by the million to the living landscapes of the nations' parklands. This process of arranging for crowds to pass happy hours learning to understand the surface of Earth is called "interpretation".

This word as used here does not mean translating foreign tongues, but instead refers to the art of communicating to people, in entertaining ways, what science knows about the world around them. This kind of education is most commonly found in our national and provincial parks, but is increasing in nature preserves of many kinds, and in school field trips involving experiences with real things.

Through nearly twenty years of being involved with interpretation, my colleagues and I have given it a more restricted meaning than is usual. We reserve the term for those situations in which information is communicated in the presence of the thing or condition being discussed. We do not consider talking about trees in a dark theatre to be interpretation, no matter how informative, enlightening, or inspiring the communication may be. Interpretation is talking about trees with the trees right there, adding to the communication process through appearance, sound, smell and feel. And while we happily included, in our interpretation programs, some communication that was not interpretation as we defined it, we did so as planned preparation for

interpretation experiences to follow. The use of the "real thing" in interpretation programs is the only dimension that sets the term apart from "information", "exploration", "education", and related terms and concepts.

This booklet is about interpretation, about Canadian interpretation, and its main concern is introducing people to and involving them with the land of Canada including its wildlife, its tame life, and its human life. More specifically, this report is about the widespread problem in Canada of landscape oriented interpretation programs degenerating in quality as they grow, as they accumulate far-flung personnel, and as they experience communication difficulties. These pages therefore, deal with the organization of interpretation, or in other words, with the question of how to help interpreters in the field interpret well by giving them a combination of challenging freedom, stimulating guidance, and support.

You will probably not agree with everything that is said here. I do not expect to agree with all of it myself next week. But I do hope that we will both agree then with the spirit of my message, for behind its conclusions are fifteen years of searching for effective ways to introduce people to Earth's landscapes.

From 1967 to 1972 I worked with the Canadian Wildlife Service initiating a nation-wide program of interpreting the Canadian Landscape - wildlife, men, and all. During my last two years in Ottawa I made a special effort to understand the successes and failures of other interpretation programs faced with the problems of scattered field locations, programs which might therefore be taken as previews of what the Canadian Wildlife Service seemed about to experience.

In this study I sought information from many sources, but was able to add ten years of my own experience in park interpretation in British Columbia and many years of interest in interpretation and interpreters throughout North America. My sources then, in addition to personal experience, are provincial park interpretation staffs in Newfoundland, Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia; many people in Parks Canada; colleagues in Canadian Wildlife Service interpretation; federal employees in the United States involved with interpretation in National Parks, National Forests, and National Wildlife Refuges; and interpreters from parks and forests in Great Britain and Australia. An early conclusion of this study, reinforced repeatedly until it became monotonous, was that interpretation programs have remarkably similar problems everywhere in the world.

I am sometimes asked why I believe that interpretation is important. It is because I believe that interpretation is uncommonly effective at making people aware of land. While in Ottawa I had the exciting task of planning and launching a program designed to increase public awareness and understanding of the face of Canada. The nation-wide scope of this program meant that it would experience the far-flung communication lines and problems already faced by the interpretation effort of Parks Canada. Both programs, in their way, had the objective of giving Canada to the people. Though I am no longer much involved in it, I still find this concept unique and exciting, for there is no more interesting country on Earth.

Canada is a land almost too large to comprehend. Sprawled across half a continent, its width is over three thousand miles from sea to sea, its depth from the frozen top of the world to green lands lush with summer is only a thousand miles less.

Over this huge block of Earth is a mosaic of landscapes proclaiming Canada to be many kinds of places with many kinds of life.

Canada is rocky seas of mountains and magnificent tables of plain, thousands of leagues of spruce woods and fertile miles of farms, frozen white oceans and cities dominating the earth as far as the eyes can see. Canada is foggy wet coasts and dry cold deserts, rolling golden grasslands and valleys ablaze with autumn leaves, lonely surf-girt islands and towns teeming with people. This land is many lands, each worth knowing. To glimpse this diversity is to feel some of the meaning of being Canadian.

All Canadians cannot know all of Canada. But most Canadians can know some of the lands that make up the whole. To know any land is to acquire an understanding of it, as well as values, and feelings of belonging that are the key to man's happy and successful living with the surface of Earth.

The art of interpretation is a powerful means for revealing that the land can react with kindness or with disastrous retaliations, depending on how it is treated. And it has proven highly successful at opening eyes and minds to the greatest story on Earth, the story of Earth itself. Knowing this is to know wisdom and delight in living life, as a person, as a citizen, as a bit of Earth's life.

People do not understand land automatically. They must be shown. And they must have come to be shown because the story and its telling are more attractive than anything else they might do at the time.

What follows are some thoughts on interpretation which highlight both its pitfalls

and its successes. My guiding philosophy throughout has been that the most important product of any interpretation organization must be effective interpretation to its audiences. The field interpreters' successes, therefore, are the measure of the organization's worth.

The Interpretation Experience

The Interpretation Experience

For years a hobby of mine has been to drop the professional status I was trying to hold at the time, and while so disguised to seek out as a tourist the museums, historic sites, and parks of North America. There I spy on interpretation programs.

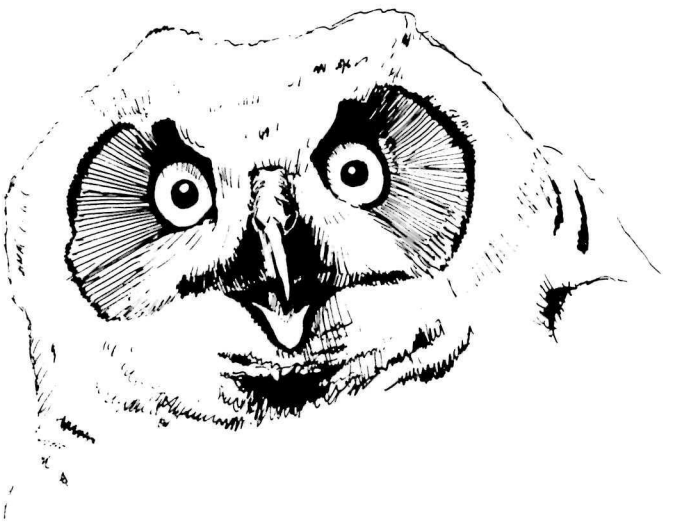
I believe that the only really important part of interpretation is how interpreters interpret. To find this out I join the audience. The alternative is to go armed with business cards to the administration, which will get you mainly theories from experts on handling paper, and if you are lucky you will meet people who once knew how to interpret. But I am sure that I learned more as a tourist; and I know that I had memorable experiences. Travel to new landscapes is stimulating at all times, but my most memorable travel delights were the flashes of insight when mere scenery became unfolding, meaningful stories. I am aware too that I am not alone in knowing the joys of reading landscapes. As a one-time interpreter I have seen thousands captivated by the discovery of Earth's meanings.

On some occasions landscape interpretation has provided especially stimulating insights. My first encounters with the deserts of California and Arizona were explorations of environments weird and fantastic by the standards of a Canadian who knew only Canada. At first I looked in awe at rocks and plants and creatures fit for science fiction, then awe gave way to frustration. There can be no deep appreciation without understanding, and I had neither. A series of interpretation experiences then unfolded dramatic and beautiful truths. An inspiring interpreter led a hike in Death

Valley; a clever little book named the cactuses; a leaflet labelled points of interest beside a road in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument; revealing exhibits in several visitor centres launched me happily into an understanding of why deserts are deserts. I can still recapture after many years these old delights as well as a desire to return to learn more.

Memorable flashes of realizing what a bit of the world is all about have often come from inspiring interpretation. I remember an interpretive book revealing Florida's Everglades, a museum breathing life into the history of an industrial Delaware valley, a nature centre giving depth to the grandeur of redwoods, and a superb interpreter, an old coal miner, who gave me one of life's unforgettable experiences in a Cape Breton coal mine now used for public education. My training helps me to work out my own understandings of places that are new, but unraveling landscape truths can sometimes be frustratingly slow. Good interpretation, on the other hand, can be a delightful rush of satisfying insight.

I am a firm believer in the value of interpretation not so much because I have seen its inspiration in others, but because I have received its inspiration myself. And I thoroughly enjoy being inspired.



The Interpretation Process

The Interpretation Process

Interpretation is communication about things that are right there helping to communicate. The ingredient that transforms information into interpretation is supplied by the presence of the "real thing". The subject itself does much of its own communicating simply by being there. Using things and other methods of communication appropriate to his purpose, the successful interpreter has the ability to reach into people's minds, and there to create interest, understanding, delight, revelation, and sometimes a lifelong new interest.

It is the interpreter who possesses magic that sharpens people's senses and opens closed doors in their minds. Using a rich fund of accurate information available to anyone with enthusiasm and an inquiring mind, the interpreter uses effective communication techniques that are usually a mixture of inherited and consciously perfected skills. The result is the communication of science - or of some other discipline - using rare skills that constitute an art. It is a lack of artistic talent that leaves many an expert an interpretation failure, even though he may be successful enough at simply conveying information.

The ingredients in the interpretation process consist of a communicator, something to be interpreted, and an audience. All three are necessary for interpretation to happen. But the catalyst that makes interpretation happen once the stage is set is the art of the interpreter. With no art there is no interpretation, for there is no successful interpreter.

The field interpreter is the key to success. To the extent that the organization behind him encourages him, supports him, leaves him free to practice his art, he will give peak performances while evolving increasing ability. As in all art, it is usually fatal to interfere with the artistic process. Art - to be good - is a personal and lonely creating. Two great painters could seldom work together to produce a really great painting. Others can direct artists into broadly defined areas, even nudge them gently into changing details, but little worthwhile can come from such talent when unhappily enslaved. It is easy to demonstrate that a talented leader can sometimes lead other talent into his way of doing artistic things, but only when the leader is clearly worthy of being followed because of his superior ability.

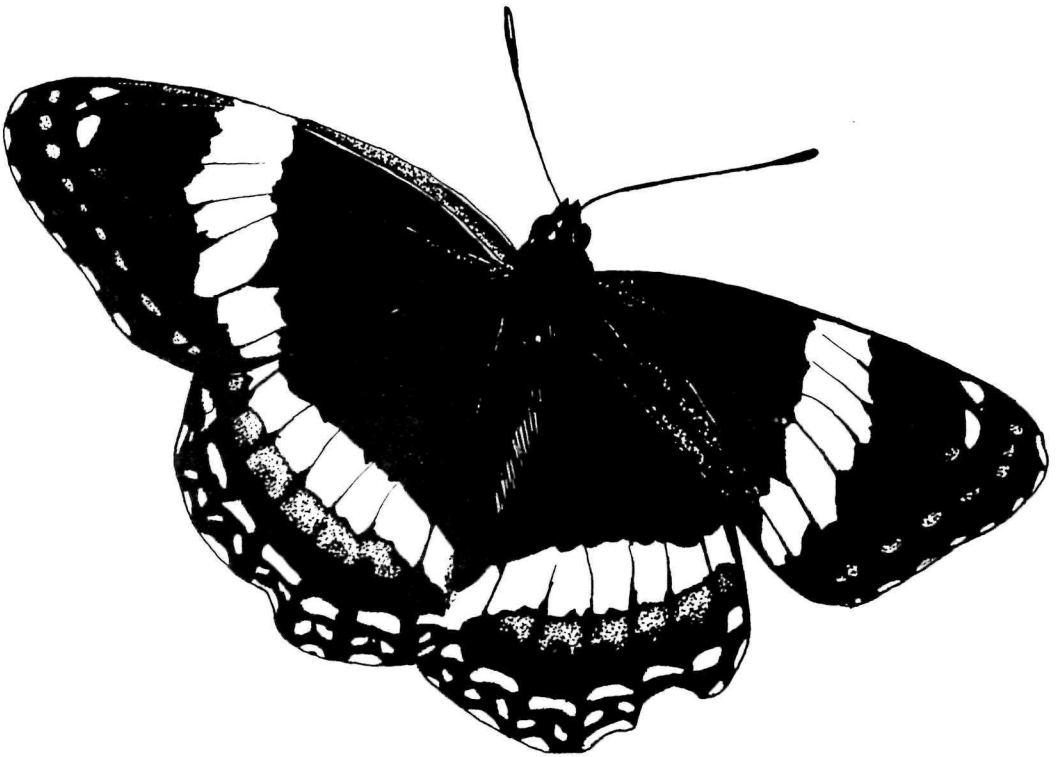
The field interpreter revealing the details and the meaning of landscapes - or of anything for that matter - is an artist. If he is the right man for the job, he has the ability or the potential to inspire through interpretation. But this ability to expand in the art of delivering information in the way that interpretation requires is a personally creative endeavour. No two successful interpreters do it the same way. It is a personal thing, so few good interpreters will stand for much of what they call interference. An untalented superior controlling interpretation endeavours from a remote office is usually intolerable. Even worse can be the land unit manager controlling interpreters that work out of the same office, seizing the daily opportunity to make the creative process impossible through constant controls.

Each individual interpreter holds the key to his success in every interpretation program. In many so-called interpretation programs there is no real interpretation, for it has been smothered by the system, and the information program that remains is apt to be a sorry thing better laid to rest. Information rarely has fire and zest; good

interpretation always has.

The whole interpretation program, from head office through regions and into the landscape where field interpreters work, can only be as successful as its field interpreters. These last are working interpreters. The others in interpretation are only support for the field.

In head office, or in regional offices too I suppose, this truth is not easy to see. Tradition favours the remote bureaucrat. Salaries decline down the line from head office to the man at the front. An unfair and long entrenched system does not pay top salaries to the key men, but at least there is hope if the system is perceptive enough to give them the freedom to excel.



The Structure of Interpretation

The Structure of Interpretation

Interpretation is a communication method with a unique combination of characteristics. Traditionally its subject matter is about the preserved landscapes in parks, presented so that the wildlife, the vegetation, the geology, the influences of weather and man are made meaningful to the public. The methods of interpretation are, however, as suitable outside parks as within them, and therefore are useful in any landscape, or for part of any landscape such as wildlife, or forests, or man and his works.

The methods of landscape interpretation have evolved in parks from the beginning of this century when outdoor education methods observed in Switzerland were taken to national parks in California. The techniques then evolved and spread throughout the national parks of the United States enjoying continuing successes and growing effectiveness. From national parks interpretation has more recently spread to state and provincial parks. In municipal areas it flourished and evolved further to meet the new needs and challenges of our increasingly urban populations. Near the cities, interpretation is now adding a new chapter to its history of evolution and adaptability by successfully assisting in outdoor education programs while combating education's preoccupation with books and classrooms.

Interpretation's purpose is to change people by exposing them to nature, to their environment, to landscapes, to the world about them, which all means much the same thing.

In spite of the handicap of having little time to get its message across, interpretation is expected to excite and delight while building new interests in people's minds. It tries to prod people's curiosities so they will go away inspired to learn more about what they have just experienced. Interpretation in its purest form is personal communication using the knowledge of science and technology to reveal with enthusiasm and everyday language, the meaning of the landscape - real, alive and right there telling its own story to the senses of the audience.

Interpretation's aim is inspiration and revelation, leaving people's lives never quite the same again because of new interest and understanding. And it works, as hundreds of interpreters have proven through half a century.

The methods of interpretation vary from program to program, and even from interpreter to interpreter, but most good programs usually have the common factor of using the methods most effective and most appropriate for achieving particular aims. The inappropriateness of many communication methods excludes them from most interpretation use, but it is still true that interpretation steals suitable and effective communication methods from all communication fields. In good hands this versatility is a great strength, but as shall be discussed later, the wrong method destroys the interpretation endeavour.

Interpretation serves people. It is a blend of many commonly understood services that in skilled hands adds the ingredients of delight and revelation, then blends in effective communication containing motivation for further involvement. Its services are five in number:

1. Interpretation is partly an information service. The basis of its message is accurate information, while participation of the audience through questions is encouraged.

2. Interpretation is partly a guiding service. It guides minds into new ideas and it guides people into interesting places. It also guides people into meaningful behaviour and orients their senses to the constant messages being transmitted by the landscape.

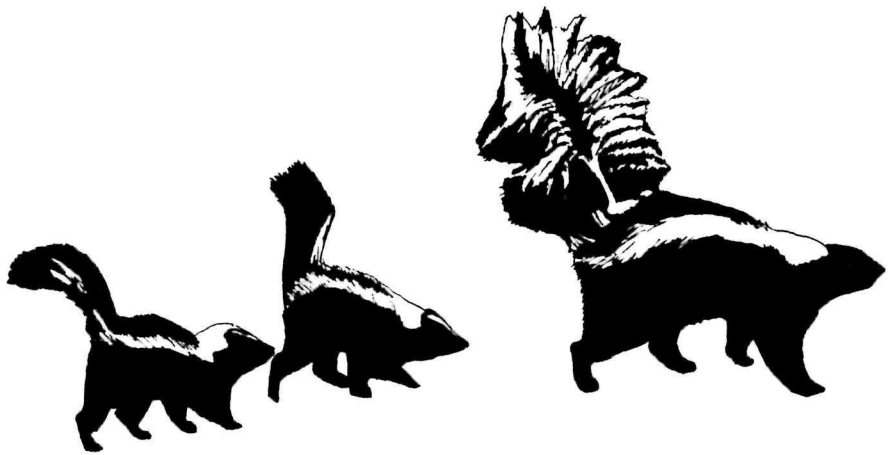
3. Interpretation is partly an entertainment service. It has to be. It must attract and hold people who are under no obligation to the interpreter, but it must do so honestly, using entertaining interpretation to attract and hold audiences rather than resorting to easier kinds of entertainment.

4. Interpretation is partly an education service. The central purpose of interpretation is to communicate knowledge. The aims of interpretation are similar to those of education. Interpretation has been used for centuries by good teachers when introducing new areas for the pupil's attention. They have always sought entertaining and exciting introductions aimed at creating enthusiastic interest, a desire to know more and eventually the revelation of a new understanding of our world.

5. Sometimes interpretation is quite properly a propaganda service, mainly in persuading people to behave less destructively toward their environment, and in encouraging new ethics in their care and use of the Earth.

But most interpretation aims at inspiration, and at involving people with the details that make the landscape meaningful.

I suppose that nature interpretation explained in its simplest terms is this: It is opening the eyes of people; it is sharpening the noses of people; it is tuning the ears of people; it is sensitizing the touch of people. We each have a number of antennae to pick up signals from our surroundings, our eyes to pick up light, our ears to pick up sound, noses to pick up odours, skin to pick up touch signals. These wonderful instruments are useless unless their signals are received. Most of us receive very little. We are not "listening". The job of interpretation is to open the minds of people so they can receive - on the world's best receiver, the human brain - the interesting signals that the world is constantly sending. And the messages sent, when added up, tell what the world is all about.



The Major Pitfalls

The Major Pitfalls

I can think of nothing more obviously negative than poor interpretation. Yet it has been the invariable history of interpretation in Canada, and in other countries, that as programs grow and spread across large land areas, they lose colour and vitality and so lose their effectiveness. Unfortunately, growth seems to contain the spores of decay.

The following account is based on many observations, and on many talks with many people. Numerous organizations are involved, and through the years I have been impressed by how universal were interpretation's diseases. If my discussion of problems seems to be familiar to readers in interpretation organizations, it is because their offices are typical, not because this account is focused on any one particular program. Our purpose here is simply to seek a safe way to good interpretation, which is really a process of mapping the hazards.

For some years I have been concerned with the decline in quality as interpretation programs age. Questions asked of many thoughtful people in national, state and provincial, and municipal interpretation organizations throughout North America brought forth several causes for quality declines, but two were almost universal: unnecessary bureaucratic controls through ponderous chains of command that sometimes also contained complete communication breaks; and a tendency for the accumulation of unsuitable staff, a trend more marked in the middle of the chain of command than at its ends. Seldom have I heard the real cause of failure to be mainly a lack of funds. As most good interpreters know, given a necessary minimum of funds, outstanding interpretation is a matter of ability and inspiration, which has a happy

history of attracting more funds. There was often some mention, however, of limitations on interpretation imposed by political and other interference directing interpreters into tasks only vaguely related to interpretation, and there was also complaint of time consuming paper work.

Ponderous and often broken lines of communication frequently isolated the field interpreters from the head office staff. Between the ends of the communication line were personnel in regional and district offices, and sometimes in offices administering land holdings, who because overworked or simply because wrongly selected, created effective barriers to inter-office communication while being incapable of generating appropriate policy, advice, or direction. The command link often especially pathological to interpretation was the one between the interpreter and the local administrator in the form of a land unit manager, call him a park superintendent, or a refuge manager, or a forest supervisor - this administrator often found himself saddled with control over something called interpretation which in many cases his education, his job experience and his personality gave him no opportunity to understand, and no basis for assessing value. Small wonder that in most large interpretation programs with long chains of command the turnover of field personnel has been high, and especially so among the most capable. At the same time, head office staffs were characterized by having usually intense feelings of being ineffectual because being the most experienced, they saw the crippling problems to be solved if only they were within reach of the solutions.

Another problem is the accumulation of unsuitable staff. Interpretation looks easy to the casual observer, and it has often been described to me as appearing to be an

an easy and pleasant "soft touch". In reality, effective interpretation requires skill and hard work but the "soft touch" impression prevails in some minds. When these minds are influential, the interpretation program can be considered a haven for employees not wanted elsewhere. Much the same result comes from the legitimate job filling process when the best person available and selected is not very good but is nevertheless taken on staff because there appears to be need of haste. Sometimes this process can be partly corrected by good in-service training; but in most organizations using interpretation, the best that can be said of training is that it is token. So, with unwanted people, failure to wait for excellence, and inadequate training, staff quality suffers. Interpretation quality inevitably suffers too.

If there are breaks in communication in regionalized organization, the major ones are usually between head office and the regional offices. In addition to other problems that may result, the isolation of head office, however partial, makes an integrated total program difficult. Each region becomes free to introduce what variations the broken links make possible. In this way, what starts as a national (or provincial) interpretation program consists of wandering parts to some degree out of touch with one another. Interpretation is more obviously susceptible to this fragmentation than many other activities not only because interpretation is on public view, but also because, being an art blending many talents, small differences in objectives, in priorities and in how some tasks are done, result in major differences in appearance and content. As shall be seen, art needs autonomy, but if artists are to co-operate to produce a composite whole, the autonomy must be integrated by common goals and periodic gentle guidance.

The problems of interpretation systems are often numerous, and in many quarters there is despair over the possibility of a cure. But perhaps what seems like chaos has only a few root causes. Small wonder, after all, if nothing seems right in a communication system that stifles the gifted, accumulates the unqualified, and cannot communicate with its communicators.

Interpretation's Important People

Interpretation's Important People

By far the most important element in the interpretation process is the audience. People are the target for all interpretation programs, and before they can be counted as participants they must be receiving the message, and understanding it. It is therefore essential that they enjoy the experience. Rarely is the audience a captive one - like school children - forced to assemble and endure the experience. The success of interpretation communication is, therefore, the extent to which its audience is affected by the message given. Unfortunately it is easy for the interpretation organization, or just for the interpreter on his own, to aim at quite a different achievement. What is to be said is usually fixed more or less firmly by the need that led to undertaking an interpretation effort in the first place; but how it is said can be a different matter. Quite commonly, surprising as it may seem, the presentation is influenced not so much by the needs of the lay audience as by desires to impress superiors or experts in the fields concerned. Teachers and professors accustomed to captive audiences often have communication habits quite unacceptable to relaxed adult audiences of volunteers looking for informative enjoyment. The measure of interpretation's effectiveness can only be the message's effect upon the target audience. Even what the boss wants may be a waste of time to the only people that should count.

The audience is seldom a representative cross-section of the public. Traditionally interpretation has operated in national parks and similar landscapes which have been most attractive and most accessible to the better paid half of North American society. This is now changing as interpretation's successes spread into urban greenbelts and

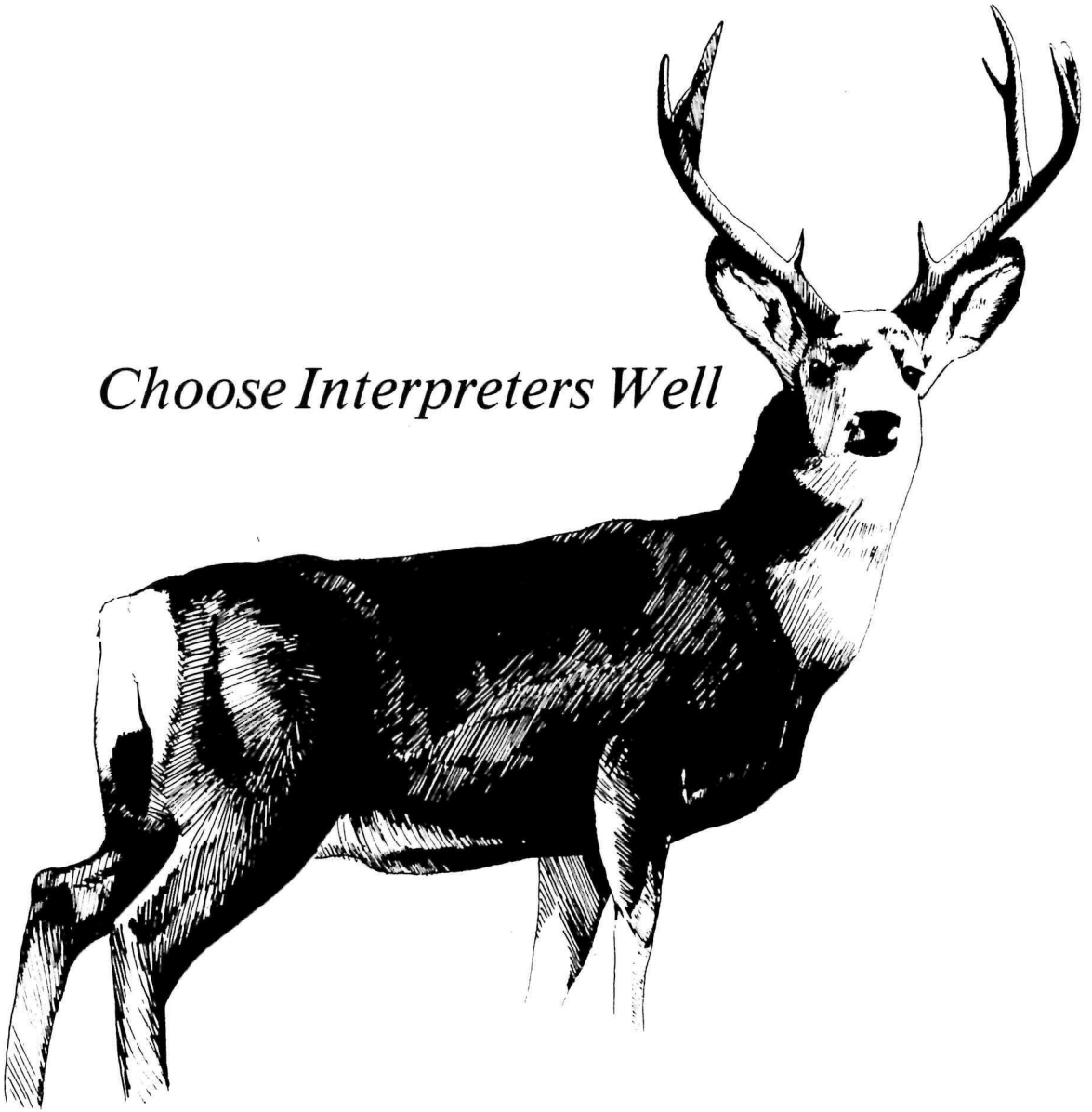
suburban parks and preserves accessible to urban people in most income levels. Even here, the better educated tend to predominate as those already interested come to feed their interests, but a powerful counter force is at work as children from all walks of life are taken to interpretation facilities by their school buses. New trends in public education favouring transporting children to educational experiences, and increasing affluence has made the necessary expenditures possible on a scale unknown to previous generations. The changing economy and energy shortages may curtail this trend, but from an educational point of view, and from the desperate need of all strata of society to be repeatedly impressed by the need of a good green earth to support our grey cities, more people must be introduced, with skill, to our landscapes and the affluent should not predominate.

Why does it matter? A decade of revolutionary change in our attitude towards the environment makes lengthy explanation unnecessary. But it is important that many loud voices now commenting on environmental issues are from minds completely innocent of relevant knowledge. Inevitably they can advocate the ridiculous or the disastrous while believing they champion ecological salvation. And the appalling thought here is that as we become increasingly urban with more and more voters living as city recluses out of touch with the realities of the green landscapes that make our cities possible, we will become a nation of voters ignorant of the country's basic needs. There is surely no easier or surer way to destroy a nation. Not for this reason, but for reasons closely allied to it, interpretation has spread knowledge and understanding of land, and how it works, for over half a century. It must now do much more, and do it better.

Every interpreter receives feedback of various kinds from his audiences which

indicates some of his successess and failures, but more organized, more reliable studies are needed. It is highly likely that casual studies of audiences measure entertainment values alone and do not include the success of the process. To measure the latter requires sophisticated digging. Since interpretation is an art I would hope that no interpreter is ever programmed, like a robot, into clinically optimized effectiveness, but on the other hand those most important people - the audiences - deserve higher returns than they presumably are receiving. In a field where no one is quite sure where true excellence lies, it is up to management to pioneer at finding out.

Choose Interpreters Well



Choose Interpreters Well

An interpretation program can be no better than the interpreters in it. The wisest possible advice, therefore, to the architects of an interpretation program is simply: choose interpreters well.

When hiring interpreters I have looked most for what people are like, how they think, what they know, what they have done in their spare time, how well they talk, and related characteristics. The administrative people helping with the evaluation of applicants may have quite another approach. They often have a major interest in the paper describing the candidates, where they find such things as age, formal education, present salary, administrative experience, and other attributes that I think of last if I consider them at all. Herein, I believe, is a major cause of poor field interpretation, for poor interpreters are hired in a paper-oriented process that assures limited success because it does not begin with an understanding of what interpretation is.

Civil servant commissions have an unenviable record of passing by good interpreters. Office administrators not intimately in tune with the needs of interpretation can also choose poorly. I have found too many successful interpreters to trust any other method than my own - a method which I used accidentally for some years before I saw its worth - and I am probably too set in my ways to change now. My method is discussed below. At the same time I have no doubt that there are better methods. In practice, perhaps the safest approach for an organization acquiring field interpreters is to give prominence to the opinions of the person with the best record of selecting good interpreters. But if the score of success is poorer than nine good ones out of every ten tried, look for outside help.

When evaluating potential interpreters I watch for several general qualities while digging actively for specific information.

> Interpretation experience can be extremely valuable. This is explored with the candidate, and I try to evaluate his interpretation effectiveness by gleaning information from his interpretation audiences. I ask about the characteristics inherent in interpretation, and seek out an expression of its contribution to the world, while looking for some show of zestful purpose and some expression of ideals for land, landscapes, and man's attitudes toward them. I look for a creative approach to problems tempered by some appreciation of what is practicable and appropriate. I look for someone who will get things done, but am aware that quiet competence can be as good as the more evident kind. I look for some appreciation of how to cope quickly and logically with administrative paper work, giving it only the importance it is due. Above all, I look for a naturalist, someone who in his own time and preferably from an early age has devoted time to "nature" (almost any part of it will do), who has organized in his mind a considerable knowledge (and often classification) of his interest, and who has done things - visible things - that demonstrate this organization, such as collecting, listing, photographing, making scientific observations, even exchanging knowledge with others. And while I look for the appreciation of what constitutes a fact, which is almost always present in university science graduates, I also look for the attitudes of a naturalist, while being wary of the bookish attitudes found in many scientists, especially

in young ones. Interpretation requires accurate knowledge communicated with warmth and the common touch to a relatively unsophisticated audience. The scientist for very good reasons is apt to be egotistical and coldly encyclopedic.

And through all this, which is really simpler than it may appear, and is often quickly done, I look for three things: (1) mannerisms or deficiencies that decrease communication effectiveness (examples: a speech defect; a distracting nervous habit; poor diction); (2) a pleasant personality, which one must simply sense; and (3) enthusiasm, which while heaven's most valuable gift to the interpreter can be quietly held and gently applied. It need not be the obvious kind - what matters is whether it is there.

If I am confronted by a naturalist of long experience who talks to me in an interesting way while not being overly shy, I give him a good chance of having outstanding interpretation potential. I then put him high on my list of names to consider in more detail.

Good interpreters show the infinite variation evident in any group of people. There is no set type. All have their strong areas, and their weaker ones. And it is a rare interpreter that is highly effective with all people. Some outstanding interpreters actually annoy a small part of their audiences. In any endeavour, I suppose, it is pretty difficult to please all of the people all of the time.

Sometimes these failures prey heavily on interpreters weary from a busy season.

The Care of Interpreters

The Care of Interpreters

The key to outstanding interpretation is outstanding interpreters, but what turns the key is a working climate that encourages excellence. It is not fashionable today for the individual to strive to excel, and the bureaucracies - both private and public - that influence all of our lives commonly favour mediocrity. Interpretation must excel to be worthwhile, otherwise it takes on negative values. It therefore makes sense for government and private organizations impressed by the proven successes of interpretation to carefully build safeguards into their organizations which ensure interpretation excellence.

Interpreters use the art of interpretation to communicate the spirit and meaning of their scientific knowledge. Interpreters are therefore artists. I have heard it said of both interpreters and artists in general that they are temperamental. I am sure that I have said it myself. Recently I became unsure that either of these statements is true. I am convinced that all art, simply because of its subjective nature, has the power to make anyone temperamental when one is forced into debate on evaluations concerning it. Yet there is no way to evaluate except through our convictions. In the mind there is no telling what is best; in the street there is no telling who is right. Each of us can have only personal preferences tempered by experience.

Interpretation as an art leaves the interpreter susceptible to the temperamental problems long associated with artists. These are not juvenile tantrums nor mental diseases; they are occupational hazards affecting the quality and quantity of production. As anyone familiar with the care and nourishment of interpreters can verify, common causes of distress among them are lack of freedom to do what needs

doing, lack of leadership from others respected for their proven superior ability, and lack of encouragement from associates, colleagues and superiors. All three have surely given artists the blues since art began.

The care of interpreters is not complicated but it is exacting. I suggest that the following ingredients be administered constantly if inspired interpretation is to result.

Stimulating Goals - Yearning for the moon was once symbolic of futility. When man finally stood on moon dust, his success was a meaningful comment on the value of striving for the seemingly impossible.

Give interpreters inspiring goals appropriate in scope and in importance to the value of the interpretation program. Put the interpreter's local work into a national (or provincial) context, and think long and wisely about what the total program is all about, and what it must strive to do. Are you "showing people nature", or "changing people's attitudes towards nature"? Are you "showing people parks" or "using parks to open people's minds to their environments"? General and well thought out goals serve to orient a far-flung program, and to give it stars to reach for so that those involved in the program will strive to attain new successes.

These objectives should not change easily, but should certainly be flexible when changing conditions or new insight into old blind spots make change necessary. Even in its foundations, nothing in interpretation should be dogma unless the desire is stagnation.

Participation in Decisions - Decision-making at all levels of an interpretation

organization must involve the participation of field interpreters, although they will not always have the best ideas. Sometimes they are too close to field problems to see them, and often they are too remote from other levels to understand them, but field interpreters *are* the raison d'etre of the program, and are by far the most experienced in the needs and problems of both interpreters and audiences "at the front". Perhaps no less important is the stimulation and knowledge gained from participation in decisions made in local, regional and head offices. There is of course no need for all interpreters to waste most of their time communicating with colleagues in remote offices, but there is need for frequent team communication, and for periodic mutual cerebration.

The benefits of such teamwork do not all go to the interpreters: other levels prone to believing that the most important part of an interpretation organization is buried in an office building in a capital city will be reminded frequently that the real action is out there beyond the smoggy horizon.

Autonomy - Art is a solitary endeavour. No one will every change that. Like anyone else, an artist can be dominated, but any attempt to control his art by domination can never result in good art. Even artists co-operating on artistic endeavours have little hope of producing much worthwhile. The individual is the creative unit. Can you imagine good art coming from any two creative artists trying to blend their distinctive talents on to the same canvas?

The interpreter requires autonomy, not complete autonomy but a large measure of it. Within the framework of goals, objectives, methods, and related program decisions provided by his planning and his administrative supports (in which he has a hand, or at which he has the opportunity to press for change), the interpreter should be

largely autonomous in his day-to-day evolving of the interpretation system that is his creation. With only gentle guiding and perhaps even with occasional redirecting, autonomy enables the qualified and inspired interpreter to grow, innovate, and excel.

Lead Gently, and with Humility - Insensitive interference with the field interpreter's field performance is possibly the deadliest enemy of effective interpretation. Successful leadership of the talented is not easy. Perhaps there are several successful approaches but certain disaster is assured by playing boss and firing off continuous directives from a remote desk.

Far better to lead by continuous demonstration that your ability makes you worth following; and having established the motto that "Nothing is so good that it cannot be made better", by participation of leader and led in a continuous co-operative search for excellence. In the absence of an innate ability to be such a leader, the formula to being worth following is simply to work much harder than anyone else. Perhaps this should be why leaders are paid more.

Another major attribute of good interpretation is frequest personal demonstration of an open mind to new ideas. Interpretation should have no dogmas, but at the same time must be based on a clearly thought out conclusion on where the methods of interpretation interfere with the message desired. Interpretation attracts a constant stream of "new" ideas (which are usually quite old and recurring ideas) that can be destructive to the moods and meanings and images that most landscape interpretation programs consider valuable. Consequently, along with an open minded approach must go a critical analytical habit that keeps the program on course. A good approach to ideas that have uncertain value is an experimental one. It is stimulating and informative to try new ideas in

experimental ways. The difficulty here lies in devising low cost means of trial, but often clear thinking shows the way. The result is exciting and rewarding to staffs that might otherwise find interpretation to have long periods of unvarying routine; and the whole approach is a healthy demonstration - at all staff levels - of the humility that one should have towards a communication art in which no one is really sure of how effective his communication is. If the leader knows the most about interpretation, I would expect him to show the most humility.

With leadership, here as anywhere, goes the frequent need to cheer and clap and comment on a job well done. It is such a simple thing, and people being what they are, it is such an important thing.

To lead one must be in touch. The successful cohesion of the greater program and the quality of its field programs depends heavily upon successful internal communication. A fatal flaw in a nation-wide interpretation system, or in a province-wide one for that matter, can be lack of communication between the office that makes general decisions and the interpreter involved with the system's audiences. There is a need not only to help and encourage and inspire, but to get these going both ways! Frequent communication, it might be added, is not only essential between leader and led. The field interpreter, for the good of his morale and the excellence of his work, should have frequent communication with his interpretation peers, and with the non-interpretation colleagues that touch his work - so that he in turn touches theirs. Easy, frequent communication solves most organizational problems.

Give What Staff and Tools You Can - Support the field interpreter as best you can. He has a difficult job, and if well chosen he will be straining at the leash to extend

and improve his interpretation. He also needs to feel supported. But note that I say support him "as best you can". This ability has two dimensions. One is the obvious matter of budget and man-years. The other is the limitation placed on you by your philosophy of interpretation. More is not necessarily better, especially in interpretation. The best interpreters that I have seen were solitary souls with no aids but their know-how, their enthusiasm, and a fascinating landscape to interpret. Load down an interpreter with equipment and helpers, and both can get in the way. Make sure that equipment serves a real and appropriate need, that it is not a potential hindrance nor just a passing fancy. And make sure that helpers have the ability to really help. Too often "helpers" need training and supervision, thus ensuring a slowdown in production.

Speakers and Slides and Movies - Reflecting upon field interpretation, I suspect that the foundations of excellence are good interpreters left largely alone to develop their excellence. In the jargon of the office, they are highly qualified personnel decentralized in the true sense of the word. Given these, most other needs fall into place, for nothing succeeds like success.

Organization to Suit the Times - This is mainly critique of the idea of "regionalization" in government. My friends will recognize here some old (and some new) opinions. Those in regional offices should find here nothing stronger than the old opinions that have left our friendships undamaged in the past.

I am not against regionalization. I simply do not believe that it serves all purposes well. And in my experience, regionalization has a perfect score of decreasing interpretation quality.

Governments administering large land masses, such as nations or provinces, tend to regionalize administration. Guided by administrators in love with the processess of administration, studies of "administrative efficiency" often recommend what is known as "further decentralization of head offices" by "regionalization". These plans have a certain superficial logic on paper, and perhaps satisfy the growth imperative of administrators and of paper manufacturers; but looked at from another viewpoint, what such plans really advocate is multiple centralization complete with ponderous communication networks, expensive job duplications, and few advantages since the "local awareness" sought is gathered up by out-going field jobs, not by large and introverted city offices.

In the final analysis, the objective of government must never be efficiency in the man-made world of government paper. It must be field efficiency at the interface between government and the land. Considerable administrative inefficiency in government offices may be necessary in order to serve Canada with efficiency.

Real decentralization is the greatest need of modern governments. The kind of multiple centralization that is usually labelled "decentralization" has a discouraging record of creating problems rather than solving them.

Government organizations relying heavily on large regional offices can easily be a 20th century perpetuation of a 19th century need. The relatively unsophisticated demands on governments of a century ago made multiple centralization a logical response to need, especially in view of the large distances often involved and the slow communications of that time. Now all of this has changed. Jet travel and electronic

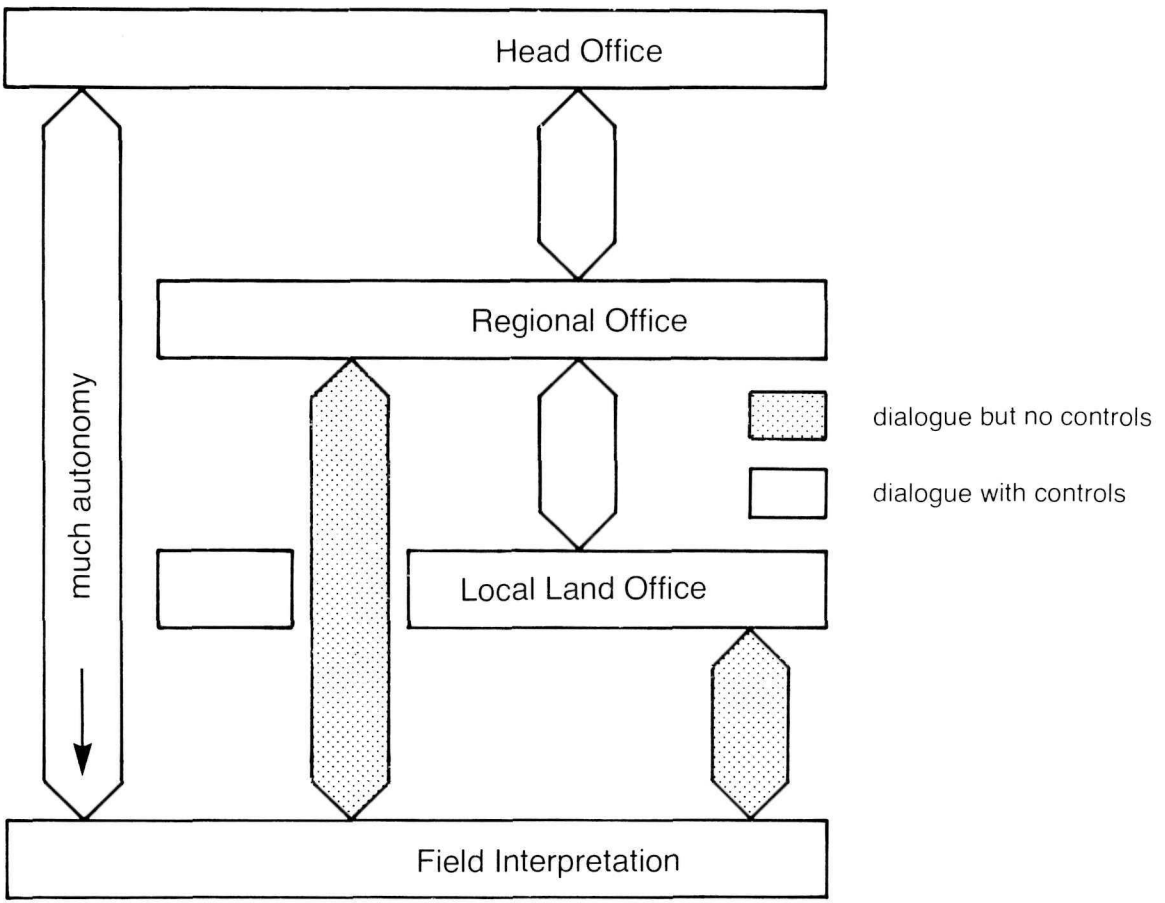
communication have shrunk distances, while Arctic oil, Banff National Park, and the economic needs of the Maritimes are now national rather than regional concerns. There presently is a need in most government endeavours to provide a high degree of autonomy for qualified and energetic field staffs which are at the same time closely monitored and assisted by a head office. There must be close communication links between the two groups to facilitate field staff participation in national decision-making. Such a system can clearly give responsive, cheaper, and better quality government that is in touch with the face of Canada.

There is need for regional offices. There are good men doing outstanding work now from such offices. Some government functions, I suspect, will always need regional offices. But some functions are sure to be hampered by them, and one such function is interpretation.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, good interpretation is creative work that is most likely to succeed in a certain favourable working climate. Like most artistic endeavours, interpretation can easily be stifled, or discouraged, or channelled into being nothing useful at all. It needs much autonomy with light and encouraging supervision, while being involved in production-planning and problem-solving with those local, regional and national elements of government that have a stake in interpretation's success.

Figure 1 illustrates a simple and direct way of accomplishing such a working organization. It is based on the premise that any organization of people - even a far-flung one - that needs to work in a unified way must have considerable internal

Figure 1


Head Office
much autonomy
Regional Office
Local Land Office
Field Interpretation
dialogue but no controls
dialogue with controls

homeostasis in spite of many external autonomies. Homeostasis is obtained by dialogue, both as required by urgency and as determined at more or less predesignated meetings for more generalized exchanges, between the field interpretation level on the one hand and offices concerned with that level on the other. This dialogue deals with both day-to-day problems and their solutions, and with the more general processes of policy and budget; interpretation's methods, quality and content; and local lands management. The aim here is simply to solve problems well, and to involve field interpretation with decision-making at several levels.

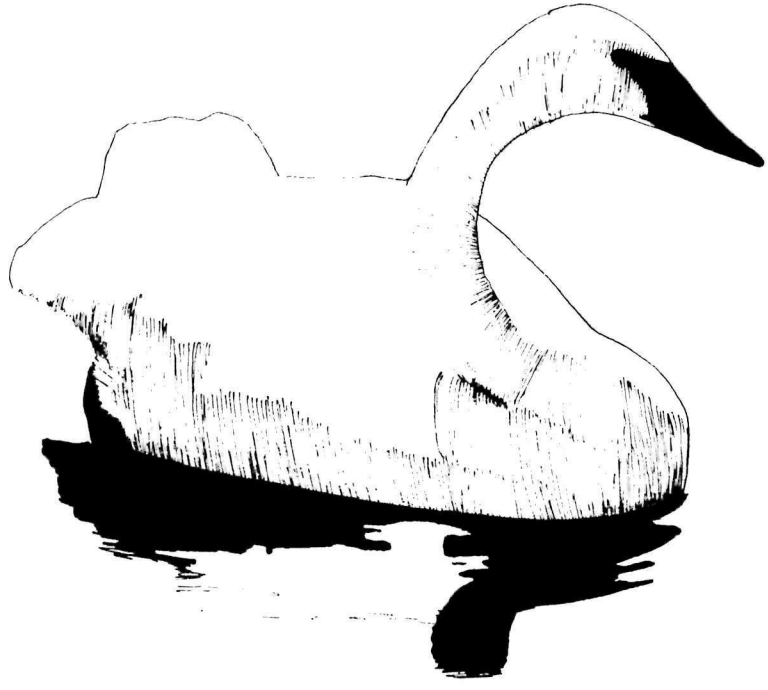
This illustrated system sets up the communication necessary for involving all levels of command with the field interpretation process and its problems, while ensuring feedback and advice from field interpretation. The system may go further in each inter-office relationship by involving interpretation with problems of mutual interest, frequently solving them to mutual satisfaction without involving a higher authority. Each level of command would have, in addition, its own normal communication channels to other office levels.

There is no need for this inter-office communication to be unduly complicated. Given the right philosophy, an easy-going desire for accomplishment with a minimum of waste effort, and appropriate encouragement for co-operation from head office, problems should be few. But, except for one feature, this system of inter-office links holds certain disaster for field interpretation. Each inter-office relationship involving interpretation certainly cannot contain a superior-inferior command association that leaves field interpretation subject to instructions. This would result in a multiple command situation that is quite unworkable. Clearly only one superior level can have

the command function. Traditionally this function falls to the chief manager of a land unit that interpretation features (like a park, or a refuge, or a forest), or if the interpretation does not operate in such a land unit the role of command falls to someone in a regional office. This is logical on paper, and at times it happens to work quite well, but it can be shown in program after program that this simple system of ladder command is a limiting and often fatal element in interpretation's working climate. The danger is that a local manager can be an expensive luxury if he is an interpretation specialist, so he tends to be replaced by a manager specializing in another field. Knowing little about interpretation, he may not consider it important. Give such a local manager daily proximity to the program and the resulting interpretation has a high probability of being fatally crippled. The alternative is the only hope of outstanding success; the qualified people in head office managing, through periodic contact, the qualified interpreters in the field. Our era of electronics and jet engines makes this possible. The result is fewer people spending less money to do a better job, even when the program is far-flung as in a national one.

As Figure 1 shows, the organization offering a suitable climate for highly effective field interpretation provides for: 1) a large measure of autonomy to field interpreters; 2) frequent dialogue between field interpretation and other organizational levels affected by or concerned with interpretation; 3) participation of field interpretation through representation in decision-making at several levels; and 4) head office control of field interpretation as necessary, but with respect for the need for autonomy, and using modern communication and travel services freely.

There may be other ways to ensure field autonomy and good economical communications. I offer the simplest arrangement that, to date, I have seen work with success.



Interpretation's Methods

Interpretation's Methods

Interpretation has a wide array of methods to choose from. Every interpretation program has its major and minor media and no two programs are ever quite the same in how they communicate. What is an appropriate and effective assortment in one situation is often not the most useful in another.

The list of methods that follows is a sort of annotated check-list which probably contains most of the approaches seen in two decades of observing interpretation programs. For convenience the methods are grouped into eight categories on the basis of some dominant attribute.

I. The Real Thing. The only really reliable communication, as Francis Bacon noted over three centuries ago, is observation of the real thing. The best way to understand a maple is to study, feel, smell, taste - yes, and listen to - a maple.

II. People Communicating. Next to the real thing, people in face to face communication are best, and there are a number of ways that spoken words from living lips can interpret.

1. A mobile leader, whether on a short or long trail, can effectively interpret landscape and its features to a following group.

2. Spot talks, isolated or in a series, can effectively interpret views or landscape features to an assembled group.

3. *Demonstration talks* are also "on the spot" but accompany a revealing activity, like netting and examining creatures from a stream.

4. *Circulating interpreters* simply circulate among people concentrated at an attraction, and offer friendly interpretive conversation.

5. *Exhibit personalities* are just that, like the old fisherman hired to sit and whittle while telling people about fish and his life at sea.

6. *Courses,* not often good interpretation, can reveal aids for understanding the world, like how to name trees and what shapes of clouds indicate the classic kinds.

7. *Theatre talks,* preferably outdoors in a makeshift theatre in a wild spot, can be effective interpretation.

8. *Information personnel,* at wickets, as attendants, or whatever, can give good spontaneous interpretative information when approached.

III. Printed Communication. The printed word can become more than ink when skillfully chosen and appropriately located. It has a number of roles to play in interpretation.

1. *Labels,* alone, or in a series such as along a self-guiding nature trail, can name things, and tell brief stories.

2. *Leaflets* can put labels in people's hands by giving brief messages about places and landscape objects.

3. *Guides and keys* in leaflet form can inform minds of "where" "what name" so they can go on to "how" and "why".

4. *Signs* using words, often with pictures, can offer perpetual interpretation of the world in sight, featuring the whole scene or a small part of it.

5. *Booklets and books,* sometimes for field use but usually for indoor preparation of outdoor minds, are foundations to interpretation.

IV. Graphics of many sorts can illustrate the difficult to imagine or difficult to see. The "look" through art into where we cannot see can be the very best interpretation.

V. Buildings, both Indoor and Outdoor. Buildings can be enclosed boxes, or open to the world, because roofless or without walls. Displays need protection, and theatres serve a crowd, so both may require "buildings".

1. *Display Halls* in nature centres are effective and can be full of inspiration and surprises.

2. *Outdoor Displays* more or less in the open have the advantage of being with the real world, outdoors.

3. *Theatres* in nature centres can be useful for films and indoor programs, but are often better at providing information than interpretation.

4. *Outdoor theatres,* best if makeshift with a view, can feature

VI. Audio-Visual Media. Say "communication", and today most people think at once of electronics. Electrically aided communication is common in many interpretation programs.

1. *Slides and strips* provide superior visual experiences and an easily modified sequence that can be personal to the speaker.

2. *Tapes* supply audio communication, either on demand or triggered automatically, that is mechanical and easily changed.

3. *Films,* when they have appropriate content for the region where shown, can be a good preparation for interpretations.

4. *Radio messages* to be received in cars and on nature trails have some interpretation potential.

5. *Live television,* closed circuit, can bring indoors intimate views of nature otherwise difficult to show.

6. *Video tape* may preserve intimate views of nature, much as in films (see above).

VII. Communication through Sales. Nature centres that have well-managed sales desks can offer sale items that extend and enrich the interpretation experience.

1. *Posters* can spread thoughts and images into public and private rooms.

2. *Postcards* can be souvenirs and teaching aids as well as far-travelling visual messages.

3. *Books and Booklets* (see above under Printed Communications) can even trigger important social trends.

4. *Slides,* sold usually in sets, enable the reliving of experiences at a later date, reinforcing impressions.

5. *Landscape Products,* like maple sugar, can symbolize the character of a landscape in a memorable way.

6. *Art* can be good interpretation to carry off, and relive later. Art is captured experience.

VIII. Improved Landscape Visibility. If landscapes communicate part of their own message, then making them more accessible or offering a new viewpoint can be good interpretation

1. Roads and Trails may improve landscape accessibility, or give close looks at special features.

2. Boats and Land Vehicles may also increase accessibility, and therefore the quantity of experience.

3. Aircraft in interpretation serve best for the aerial viewpoint, often unexpectedly revealing.

4. Observation Towers offer elevated views of the land, invading the treetops, opening up prairie and marsh

5. Down-ramps are negative towers, revealing what is underground or underwater.

6. Boardwalks enable walking on marsh or swamp or bog; or seeing but not harming fragile dry land.

7. Blinds can enable inexperienced people to watch closely shy and seldom seen animals.

8. Telescopes enable the close inspection of distant scenes and unapproachable animals.

9. Magnifying Glasses enable our visual entry into details of our world that we normally overlook.

There are no doubt methods that are not in this list, but those most frequently used should be here, and some rarely used as well.

Each method is variable in itself depending on how carefully it is chosen, how appropriately it is planned, how sensitively it is used. With this infinite variety at its disposal, each interpretation program can be thought of as an orchestration of communication methods composed for a specific time and place. Whether the result is etheral music or disastrous dischord is a matter of artistic ability, for which the artists, working alone or in concert, will earn cheers or jeers.

Guidelines for Excellence in the Field

Guidelines for Excellence in the Field

Through years of planning and directing outdoor interpretation field programs I have been an enthusiastic user of other people's interpretation efforts. I enjoy becoming just another tourist. Not usually as a disguised spy but rather as a real tourist quite as uninformed as my fellow tourists, I have gone forth seeking enjoyment, and involvement, and intellectual orientation. In this way I have experienced interpretation in parks, wildlife refuges, construction sites and other outdoor situations as well as in my other tourist haunts, museums and historic sites. In these places I have been given many memorable experiences.

Joining the audience as just another person is my top priority. I do this first, and only later, if there is time, do I present myself as a fellow professional. But unfortunately, once I am revealed as a fellow professional, I am never sure how atypical is the theory and practice brought forth for my inspection. While I have learned much from the kind co-operation of other interpreters, it is the tourist experiences that I have found most valuable in identifying interpretation's problems, and in planning its way to some measure of success. In theory, interpretation aims at changing people's awareness and understanding, in practice this is not easy to do. The contact between program and audience is the moment of truth and the place of all importance, and it is here that many programs fall short, often for small reasons.

In the appendix Dr. Solman says it more effectively than I ever could: In an age of sophisticated technology we must have great wisdom in choosing interpretation methods that are appropriate to our message, that deliver the message, and that do not themselves get in the way of the message. Dr. Solman is both one of Canada's foremost

naturalists and an enthused student of modern technological achievements. He has also an observant nature and an enthusiasm for landscape interpretation. These make his analyses unusually valuable because they are from a broad and unobstructed vantage point. Dr. Solman's ideas form the foundation for the following comments, which are based on observations of field interpretation communicating with people.

Almost everyone who has thought deeply about interpretation concludes that it is done best by a real live interpreter taking one or a few people into the landscape and there communicating on a one-to-one basis. But as is also well known to everyone concerned with the realities of interpretation, this one-to-one approach is almost never considered practicable. The real life picture has either electronic or printed messages aimed at crowds of people, or interpreters trying the impossible of effective interpretation to small mobs. It is a matter of quality and quantity being incompatible, a not uncommon condition in this world of too many people.

The matter resolves to establishing the purpose of interpretation. My favourite refrain is that it is all worth while if an interpreter changes the lives of one or two people a day, but perhaps it is being naive to expect it to happen when an interpreter is coping with a perpetual mob scene. The solution seems obvious. If I were planning a new interpretation program, I would plan two parts, one aimed at quality interpretation to a few, the other aimed at the crowds that democracy and politicians would require. Everyone, it seems, plays the numbers game when serving the public, so "more is better" even though more may really mean that no one gets anything worthwhile. Since interpretation is unlikely to be able to ignore the crowds, it must do the best it can to serve them as effectively as possible under the circumstances. Nevertheless I am convinced that a good interpretation program must have some good interpretation,

this being the best possible service given under the best possible conditions. Ideal conditions include a small audience.

Interpretation is meaningless unless it makes converts. To ensure that it does, part of the program offered must serve audiences of ideal size, the control on size being done in any of several ways, and being done quite openly for clear and convincing reasons.

As our crowds grow, we must be sure that interpretation keeps interpreting effectively to at least part of the audience, if for no other reason than to know how to do it. Merely informing crowds is not good interpretation, but this is what most interpreters find filling their days. We must plan for better, and work to make it so.

Related to the modern "more is better" doctrine is an assumption in much interpretation planning that the audience must be given a quick and superficial message because people are in a hurry and restless to move on. People today *are* in a hurry. It is partly daily habit, and health authorities tell us it is not healthy. It easily becomes an addiction that we take with us into our recreation and our vacations. People today are unaware of the world, partly because they have not taken the time to look at it, to think about it, to ask about it.

It is just these things that interpretation tries to get people to do. Yet much interpretive effort that I have encountered fosters rather than counteracts the habit of breathless, superficial experience. If something is worth interpreting, it is worth trying to slow people down so at least part of the experience is substantial and worth while. Interpretation must do more encouraging of leisurely experience, more offering the

prolonged or sequential interpretation that makes the experience meaningful. It is true, however, that even on wild public lands such as parks that receive heavy visitation, the total visitor experience is encouraged to be superficial as a matter of policy, so that any efforts of interpretation to reverse this trend may be out of step with general policy. Again we have an example of interpretation in difficulty because associates and senior administrators do not know its needs, or perhaps there is just internal conflict of purpose with resulting conflict in action. But there is no doubt as to the anomaly. In park after park throughout North America, for instance, there are costly miles of public roads encouraging rapid landscape viewing and the atrophy of muscles while compromising the otherwise wild scenery with asphalt and vehicles; yet in the same parks can be found dedicated interpretation staffs devoting much of the summer to entice people away from their cars into the natural, wild, unengineered landscape that is the real park.

Often I have visited a landscape attraction, like a refuge or a park, and have found it difficult to know, first, if there is an interpretation program, and second, where to find it. Information on interpretation should be easily obtained, so easily that those not already interested in it know about it, and are attracted to it. It is surely the uninterested that most need an inspiring interpretation program, not the already inspired who know something of how to get the landscape to tell its own stories.

Just as the interpreter himself can be by far the most effective means of communicating the interpretation message, the interpreter when not satisfactory in his performance can become a considerable disaster. Granting that we all have our off days, and also that some people are just not made to be interpreters, I have seen some dismal interpreter performances. The worst and rather common sort of performance,

which it takes a trained eye to see, is the interpreter who remains cloistered somewhere in the private recesses of a building, from where he periodically ventures forth to press a button and so start a canned audio-visual show. In some cases I have known this to be the interpreter's way of doing thngs, not his organization's way. It helps to hire people who enjoy people. Failing this, pressure from superiors should keep reluctant interpreters among the audience, where the resulting practice and confidence can turn reluctance into high motivation to communicate. The reluctance can be due to shyness and inexperience, both of which are cured by determined doing.

Many interpreters are hired for summers only, and many of these temporary people are science students. I have hired many myself, and like others, I am drawn to their knowledge, to their availability in summer when most needed, and to their age which should offer zestful youth with some adult capabilities. With careful choosing these university people can be good interpreters. But something that the university experience does to people often gets in the way and sometimes cannot be weeded out. Many successful interpreters remain partly crippled communicators because of it.

What has happened to them is a complicated series of changes that add up to some loss of "the common touch". Their explanations become too involved for the non-scientist. Their choice of words becomes complex and sometimes sounds unnecessarily learned on purpose. Enthusiasm is controlled because it is not "professional." There is more cold fact and less warm communication; less joining the people to help them understand, more telling the public how it is; and in the worst cases there is a touch of arrogance and a talking down to the audience. If the organization wraps such a specimen in a semi-military uniform, then everything is programmed to go wrong. Interpretation needs zest, and warmth, and accurate clarity, even simplicity

sometimes, and touches of nonsense presented as such, and mystery, and drama. It must be constantly planned that way, and gently controlled to stay that way, and it must not be present only in people, but in all communication media.

In all interpretation programs it is not only people who are communicating. Everything, from building design to the kind of print on a label, is saying something - perhaps silently - that is part of the total message. If you are "selling" nature, beware of cold science in your people, and beware of "contemporary and urban" designs in your exhibits. At the same time never confuse low budget with poor quality. The tent can be better than a building, and logs on a beach can always be better than a formal theatre.

Another commonly observed trap is that "the program is popular, so the program is a success". My associates must be tired of me exposing this ever-present fallacy by saying, "If crowds mean success, we can be much more successful, for less money, by offering free beer. But we are not paid just to pack them in. We are paid to reach as many as possible with the message it is our business to communicate". A classic example of interpretation gone astray is an evening program I attended in an outdoor theatre in the glorious Canadian Rockies, where my burning desire to learn about my surroundings was served by a movie on salmon canning on the Pacific Coast. The place was crowded, but it was not because of successful interpretation.

Much of the interpretation of America is based in large part if not entirely on "book learning". But the best interpreters are those that can speak also from experience. Naturalists make the best landscape interpreters. Local naturalists can be the best of all. I remember a friendly Indian in an Ontario history reconstruction who was an endless source of entertainment, fresh viewpoints, and new ideas on how his

ancestors did things. Most interpretation programs lack something called "local colour". And this is sad, because the person who has it can easily offer the best communication possible.

I have known many people working at landscape interpretation, and it is a recurring surprise to me that few of them put much effort into observing how effective they are as interpreters. Difficult as it may be, there is a great need for investigation into the effectiveness of interpretation as an influence on the public. Poorly thought out questionnaires have often been inflicted on the public, yielding completely predictable and useless results, but seldom has the impact of a program been carefully assessed. Other communication fields like formal education and advertising are digging deeply into their effectiveness, and here perhaps is interpretation's easy entry into this field. There is need of at least broad guidelines on the relative effectiveness of various communication media in given interpretation situations to lead us beyond some present suspicions that several methods widely used are almost a waste of time. Part of the problem lies with interpreters assuming that their own preferences are what matter. It is easy to forget that the audience and only the audience can tell us what is best. The great problem is that the audience is quite unable to tell us directly, so it takes skillful testing and observation to bring out useful messages.

Most interpretation gives the same treatment to all comers, and this works rather well if the messages are aimed at what might be called "the newspaper mentality level". Interpretation that is trying for excellence, however, tailors the message to the audience when the group is known to have common characteristics. The rural church group and the city bird club should be given quite a different message as they are led down the same trail, using their different interests and experiences to lead them into new outdoor adventures. Children obviously need some special treatment and teachers

in groups need not only some of the standard treatments, but some instruction in how to interpret. Programs rarely stress these differences, and they should. Good interpreters, however, soon learn how to adapt to such specialized audiences.

In my many exposures of interpretation as a tourist seeking the experiences that turned ignorance or confusion into delighted understanding, several times the key to insight was a simple pamphlet or booklet. Mostly these things are not too useful, but occasionally they are brilliantly conceived for interpreting environment. I remember a little booklet that was simplicity itself for curing my confusion over California's trees. The first step I needed to take was to name them, and the booklet helped me to do this easily during a few hours of happy roaming. I have seen another booklet take a riot of alpine flowers and reveal to people the separate kinds - their names and a few distinctive facts about each. Not the least benefit from such a book is people on their knees, thoroughly enjoying the first time they really looked closely at their world.

In general the field of interpretation has been guilty of much publishing, and most of it has been rather drearily tainted by the cold and colourless influence of science. If interpretation is to reach the people it must do so on their terms. The accuracy of science is, to a degree, essential in interpretation, but interpretation is art, not science. It is my belief that good art is a bit of a lie that enables us to see the truth. A little humanizing of our messages and interpretation would vastly increase its listening - and understanding - audience. Carried into publishing, this approach could result in best sellers. We can hardly be satisfied with less, yet we carefully avoid such success by making the most fascinating stories on earth - what the world is all about - a dreary reading experience. "Popularize" is not a dirty word, it is showing people that natural science is interesting and easy. And they deserve to know, for they paid for the communication effort.

I believe also that the most valuable kind of interpretation is that which features the usual. How much easier it is to talk of something unusually glamourous, unusually large, and unusually beautiful. Since many of our parks feature landscapes that are unusual, the interpretation in such places can consist of little that seems to relate to ordinary people who spend most of their lives in undistinguished places. I do not agree completely with William Brown* that the purpose of all interpretation should be an evangelical pitch to save the world from ecological disaster. I am more for joyful understanding of the world and the healthy concern for its care that knowledge may bring. While standing before a spectacular mountain that has grizzly bears on it, I would expect the interpreter to spread awareness of mountains and grizzlies as dynamic elements of that environment, but I would hope for equally revealing treatment of the grass underfoot and the cloud overhead and of me standing there too. Part of the message could be an easy and natural revelation of how mountains, grass, and men influence one another. In an unforced way this discussion might even become sufficiently "environmentally concerned" to please William Brown.

If it is the role of interpretation to reveal the world, it is at least as important to lead minds into the micro-world of a drop of water, or to the usefulness of a feather, as to lead them into the tourist attractions which often have little real importance because they are a local happenstance.

If everyone really understood grass, they would understand enough of the world to solve most of its man-caused problems.

*Islands of Hope, National Recreation and Park Association, Washington, 1971.

The Interpretation of Canada

The Interpretation of Canada

More Canadians should know Canada, not just by seeing more of it, but by understanding more of it. The need is essentially an ecological awakening of a people in which interpretation plays a major role. It must be a process of revealing Canada to Canadians, of displaying the regions of Canada and what makes them different. Perhaps most important, it must be a process of showing how to care for Canada to keep her productive. In an era when we are increasingly an urban people scarcely aware that it is green Canada that makes our gray cities possible, really knowing Canada is not just a matter of duty or of education, but a matter of survival.

To date, the interpretation of landscapes is most familiar to Canadians who visit wild parks in North America. Most such interpretation has centred in the parks of the scenic west; and east or west, these parks have been patronized mainly by middle-class vacationers with outdoor, out-of-city interests, who found there through fifty years an increasing number of park interpreters ready to communicate about land. These interpretation programs were our first major steps towards ecological enlightenment offered to people outdoors and confronted by the living land "in person". Now new trends in teaching ecology, both in schools and outside them, show promise for informing more people. Unfortunately some teachers who are not qualified to teach ecology are still being instructed to present it as a low priority subject, and under these circumstances there is not much hope for a comprehensive picture nor for sharp focus. This is unacceptable treatment for the most important story in our living world.

In Canada natural resources are provincial jurisdictions. There seem to be seeds of disaster in the fact that provincial governments are traditionally preoccupied with

exploiting the land's resources while giving token attention at most to knowledgeable care of the land. As current federal trends suggest, and as provincial default appears to make obligatory, taking ecology and ethical values into our use of the landscape must be mainly a federal concern.

We live in the Age of Ecology, but few people are aware of it. Most believe that "ecology" is a news media word that goes with "pollution". We must do better. Ecology is the key to revealing the living Canada to Canadians. It is a story as old as Earth's green life yet as young as today's headlines, a story revealed through a million years to the slowly improving human mind. It is exciting as only the most important story on Earth can be, because it is about Earth's surface which is not only our home but possibly the most unique, most complex thing in the universe. The story is about us humans and the countless other bits of life that make us possible, and the last chapters are about how we might even learn how to remain on Earth as inhabitants of its green living skin.

Taking Canada to Canadians should be a process in two parts. First the home, the home neighbourhood, and the home province should be revealed. The rest of Canada would be the second step. Home comes first, and if home is the heart of a city, the fascinating ecological story of the city is the one to begin with. Unfortunately many interpreters and teachers insist on taking city people out of the city into wild places to show them the facts of Earth's life, and the city is as good a place as any in which to begin revealing how life lives. It is the best place to begin when the city is home. Small wonder that city dwellers feel apart from nature when even those trying to teach natural history have the same blind spots. The city offers excellent examples of ecological principles in its green parks, green gardens, green "waste" areas, green

sidewalk cracks, as well as in its uniquely urban ecological story told by houses, the things in shops, people, the sources of supplies, transportation, sewers, smog, and so on. Telling the ecological story of the city in the city to city people is probably the most important ecological communication available to nations with large urban populations.

Telling the story of the home province presents the problem in Canada that most people live where a long history of landscape modification by man has resulted in most evidence of landscape origins being erased. To understand the role of man on the land there must be some understanding of processes predating man's reshaping of the landscape. Canada's wealth of good soils in southern Ontario and in the western plains, for example, is the work of plants and animals and other creative forces through thousands of years. Examples of the original condition are the only means for understanding this wealth, and perhaps more important, the only means for discovering how to perpetuate it.

If we are to understand southern Ontario, for example, we need a large area of hardwood forest on good soil in the region. It is not good enough to save some mean remnants of this forest. The wooded areas surviving from the great original forest are small, highly modified, often on poor soil, and usually poorly accessible to people. If we are to have a proper patch of forest we will have to "make" it. We must plant our forest, and guide its growth back to nearly how it was two hundred years ago, then let it take its own form. If this will take fifty to one hundred years, that is not long in the life of a forest, and let us hope it is not long in the life of Canada.

The same sort of wisdom and appropriate action is necessary if we are to have a

large and wild national grassland on good soils. For decades now we have been unable to find unploughed prairie, even on poor soil, that was not defended by cows. The goal is to establish native grassland on centrally located wheatlands. As in Ontario, the need is for good land, and for a location that really does take prairie understanding to the people.

Having awakened the appreciation of Canada near home, the program must make it easy for people to take their new insight into land to other parts of the nation. Again the country's best interpreters must reveal the land's details, and the transportation necessary to see it must be supplied - at least to low-income groups - by government. Moving large groups of people is now a common skill offering efficient, low-cost services, and all it needs as a companion is provision for good, low-cost accommodation. Supplying this last is now well understood by agencies moving groups of student tourists about Europe. Funds for such a plan could come from several sources, in part from provincial taxes on the extraction of public natural resources; in part from federal sources like health (Keep Them Healthy), defence (National Unity), parks (Less Construction, More Instruction), agriculture (Understand the Farmer); in part perhaps from a national lottery for a "motherhood" cause more important by far than the Olympic Games.

The National Parks have supplied some of the needs discussed here, but most established to date are of limited usefulness because of their locations, and because their wilderness nature is often not suitable for mass education in ecology and could even be destroyed by it. Further, since National Parks are mostly wild lands of atypical scenic excellence, they are usually removed from concentrations of population and they are seldom typical of the Candian landscape. The most important lands of Canada - important from the nature of their soils, climate and ability to support happy people - are either poorly represented in our national park system, or are not

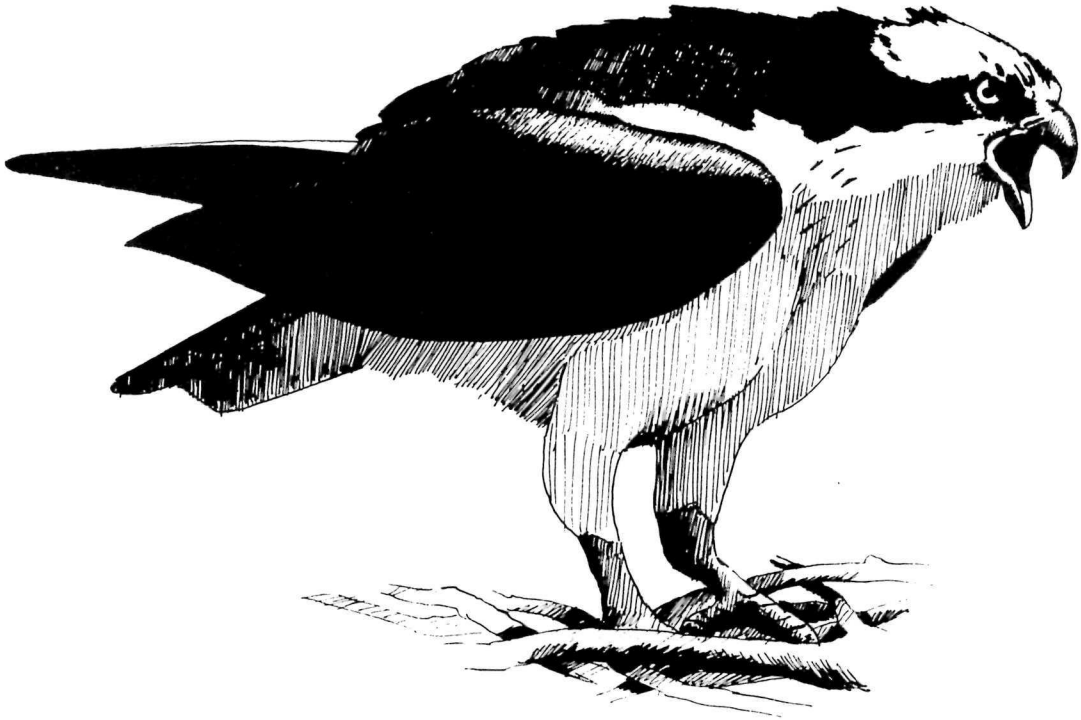
represented at all. National Parks could be useful in revealing Canada to Canadians, but in a quite limited way.

If we are to reveal Canada, the need is for patches of wild land in the right places across the nation; and these should not be places primarily for fun and games, but places for the pleasures of discovery, of adventure, of insight into something worthwhile. Actually, the tamed lands of Canada just as we find them would be those most used to reveal Canada, but some special areas are needed to show our ecological foundations.

Land, however, is not enough. With it must be a corps of exceptionally good pied pipers to lead us into exciting experiences of understanding ourselves and our land.

To most of us Canada's face is a coloured shape on a paper map. Perhaps some day Canada to most Canadians will be what she really is, a sweep of living landscape, incredibly varied and beautiful, filled with lively stories and engrossing mysteries.

And it is, after all, worth knowing about because it is very close to being everything that we have.



Appendix

monument and about what you are going to see. That is delivered to you during the most confining experience it is possible to have, with about a hundred people packed like sardines in a windowless elevator, where there is no room to do anything but listen. When you arrive at the top you are more ready for the view and the walk down than when you started up.

In the Canadian climate we probably have to have buildings to provide creature comforts for people. Buildings, transport, conveniences are secondary to the message you are trying to convey. In some of the interpretive units in Europe, after briefing in a building, you are sent out with a guide or with carefully prepared literature to station yourself in a hide or lookout from which you can see the distinctive wildlife or flora in the area. The hide is designed to be unobtrusive. The confrontation is between you and the plants and animals.

The underwater viewing chamber here at Wye Marsh puts you eye to eye with frogs, fishes, turtles and aquatic plants.

I would like to see this kind of intimate viewing extended into as many different parts of the environment as is possible. The boardwalk enables large numbers of people to go through the marsh with minimum damage to it. To really understand a marsh, however, you have to view it from many angles, including the aerial one. I have considered ways of doing this without destroying the values we are trying to observe. If we launch people overhead in balloons or helicopters or aircraft, we create a disturbance aloft which marsh wildlife might find disconcerting and marsh observers at ground level would find distracting. A St. Louis type arch, or even a very tall tower, would also be out of context in a marsh. Maybe a television camera hung from a

stationary captive balloon feeding a large screen would give people an idea of the marsh from above while they looked out the window at it horizontally or saw it from the underwater viewing room.

If we did not have to deal with masses of people, we could do the whole thing very much more simply. A few individuals at a time could be taken out quietly in a balloon and given the experience I am talking about. Because we want to handle large numbers of people to get a large segment of the population informed about the out-of-doors, we have to use mass methods that do not destroy the habitat in the process.

"Why do we want to have large numbers of people see a marsh and begin to understand it?" Because if we fail to get greater public awareness of the value and beauty of marshes very soon, we will not have marshes. If you say, "So what?", my answer to that is that the world will be a poorer place to live in when the last marsh is no longer available to visit and experience.

You have had many definitions of interpretation that I cannot improve. You have closed circuit television to bring you intimate views of outdoor life without making you walk several miles and wait half a day to see the thing happen and, more importantly, without disturbing the happening. We can make much greater use of modern technology than we have in the past by exposing people to experiences that once happened only to specialists. However, we must be careful that we do not get so involved in technology we forget that the relationship we want is between a boy or a girl and a frog or a flower. We seek the moment of wonder when a person first realizes the beauty of a leopard frog spangled by the sunshine filtering through the overhanging leaves.

In the Canadian environment, it is not always pleasant to be out of doors so we must have a place where people can see, at any time and in any weather, some of the things that make up the marsh, its use by the wild creatures and by man - now, in the past, and in the future. The fact that the displays around you are easily changed is important. The day of the unchanging display is a thing of the past. Marsh ecology changes minute by minute. To reflect that, we keep changing the mood and the exhibits in our displays. We have to change our slide and movie presentations also as an introduction to the marsh. We want people to come back to the marsh and the interpretive centre because one exposure is only the beginning. What we need is to get people hooked on ecology and to keep them coming back for more and more because the "trip" is pleasant and beneficial. Not everybody who visits the centre will get hooked on marshes and perhaps that is as it should be. Some people will get so thoroughly hooked that they will end up in the business. I would tell them that you will not make a lot of money, you may not even influence the affairs of the world the way you hope, but you will certainly have challenge, excitement and enrichment that will last your whole life. You will have the satisfaction of being able to show people some of the wonders of the world which exist under their feet and around them, which, without your help, they would never experience.

The ideal of interpretation is to provide each young person with a grandfather who was an old "marsh rat". If you have read Robert Ruark's book "The Old Man and the Boy", you will realize how much it meant to Bob to have a grandfather who knew the score about outdoor recreation, who knew how to shoot birds, catch fish, and who personally taught Bob what he knew. It was not until he was much older that Bob began to realize how much he had learned from the old man, and how much of what the old man knew had probably been passed onto him by his grandfather.

Because interpretation is experience, it is difficult to deliver. Interpretation is total involvement in an experience which may only happen a few times during a whole life. We cannot often duplicate that in mass production. We must do the best we can with all the tricks we know. We have to recreate the shock and thrill of personal discovery. We have to put people in situations where they cannot help but become involved. We need facilities in which we can subject people, one at a time, to the thrill of discovery by bringing them face to face with something they have never seen, felt, touched, heard or smelt before. We may need isolation chambers in which people can have those experiences.

How do you stage a flight of Canada geese against an autumn sunrise? How do you package it so you can reproduce it for a number of people? We really do not have the technology to do that. We can capture some of it in movies and on videotape, and we can pass it on as second-hand experience. In mass interpretation we have to do quite a bit of that. We must try to give each person who visits an interpretive centre or area an absolutely original and meaningful experience. Our greatest challenge is trying to engineer a sense of mystery, awe, and discovery so that it can be repeated.

Since some of the modern urban generation responds to hard rock music with electronic amplification and psychedelic lighting, we may have to use that kind of thing to attract those people so that we can subject them to something totally different. If you spend most of your time at a discotheque, the silence, peace, soft colours, and slow changes in a marsh may be a great shock to you. Maybe we need a portable marsh that we can put downtown in a big city to pull people off the street, and let them experience it a few at a time as a contrast to the sights and smells of the surrounding city. Some of the tiny new city parks in the United States are designed around a little bit of that idea, but much more can be done with it.

Not everybody is a candidate for interpretation as we know it. Maybe we have to be content that five or ten per cent of the world see and hear our message and lead enriched lives because of it. It may not be possible to enrich everyone's life through an interest in the natural world, and perhaps we should not try. If we bring in the discotheque crowd, we may find they are not the people who can be helped by nature interpretation. Or perhaps you believe that interpretation can benefit everyone. I hope that is true.

Some of the best interpretation occurs with very young children who easily become fully involved in whatever they are doing. If something is at frog's eye level, fine! Lie down and get your eye where you can see it. If it is up a tree, fine! Climb the tree and have a look. That kind of enthusiasm is harder to generate in the dignified 60-year-olds, although some of them will react the same way if you give them a little encouragement. We need interpreters who are not only skillful, but gentle and very tactful. I am impressed with the ease with which certain people can develop interpretive activity using simple materials immediately at hand. I have walked across a pasture with a group of boy scouts, called their attention to some of the plants, animals, and associations, and found that they got a totally new idea about a pasture field just from that one walk across it. I am depressed by the people who could walk across the same pasture field 100 times and not see anything.

When I read the writings of Edwin Way Teale and realize that much of what he wrote about happened in his own back yard or in a rented orchard alongside it, I am impressed that after a lifetime on an acre of ground, he had no trouble finding new things to experience and study.

After all this talk, about all we can say is that there is no limit to what

interpretation could be, either in simplicity or complexity. It may be more effective interpretation to take one child by the hand, show him a live frog in a marsh and explain to him something about its place in marsh ecology than to have an audience of 100 people see the film "World in a Marsh". What interpretation might be is up to each one of us and how we go about our work. What it might be may change from day to day and place to place. If somebody finds a good way to make a certain point, his colleagues may pick it up. What works well here may not work at all at another location. The weather, the time of day, the distance from the last meal, the size of the shoe on the foot, and many other things decide whether interpretation succeeds or fails. Since we only control the presentation, we really control only a small number of the variables. We must use our training, experience and imagination to do the best we can.

Interpretation really takes place pretty much by itself. The geese that slant down across the sunset were not programmed by us to fly there in just that way. Yet, they may better interpret the marsh to the person who sees them than all the time, money and tricks we use. That is really what interpretation should be like.

THE NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA is a private, educational, non-profit organization incorporated under Federal Charter for the purpose of promoting the benefits and ensuring the protection of our great National and Provincial Parks, so that Canadians, as well as visitors to this country, may enjoy them unimpaired for all time.

Specifically, its aims and objects are:

★ *To promote the use and management of National and Provincial Parks in a manner that will contribute to the education, inspiration and well-being of the general public.*

★ *To uphold the highest standards of these samples of our heritage and promote by all appropriate means the widest understanding of their purposes.*

★ *To encourage the expansion of both the National and Provincial parks systems and the preservation of places having outstanding natural or historic significance.*

★ *To cooperate with governmental agencies and with private, non-profit, charitable, educational and scientific organizations in protecting the integrity of National and Provincial Parks, historic sites and nature reserves, and to seek the support of such organizations and of all other interested persons in furthering these objectives.*

★ *To institute and encourage research into all matters pertaining to the fulfillment of the foregoing aims.*

The Association depends for support upon its members and upon grants from private and corporate donors. Membership classes are: $4.00 Student, $10.00 Active, $13.00 Husband and Wife, $30.00 Contributing, $50.00 Supporting, $100.00 Sustaining and $1,000.00 Life. Institutional Rate, $20.00 for Journal only. Other contributions and bequests are also needed. Donations to the Association in excess of the basic $10.00 Active membership fee, which covers the cost of Park News, is an allowable deduction for income tax purposes.

The National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada is a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

THE NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

47 Colborne Street, Suite 308, Toronto, Ontario M5E 1E3
Telephone:
Area Code 416, 366-3494