

# Introduction to the Handbook

## About the Handbook



Freeman Tilden said it best in his 1957 classic, *Interpreting Our Heritage*: "Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program."

How can you plan interpretive programs for those young people who will someday inherit the state parks legacy? Experienced interpreters say the first step is to approach life as a child: allow yourself to crawl about the ground on your knees, roll in the cleanliness of tide-washed sand, or examine at length the busy activity of an ant colony as the little creatures scurry back and forth. If you can find joy in these things, you are ready to attempt the second part of the interpretive process: sitting down and designing a Junior Ranger program that will provide both meaning and enjoyment for your young guests and a true sense of satisfaction for you. This handbook is a place to start.

A Junior Ranger program can be a staff-led interpretive program, the Adventure Guide, a park-specific self-guided workbook, or web-based activities. Comments from parents and program participants favor the one-on-one interaction children receive during staff-led activities, but self-guided activities are a viable option and can be just as beneficial. Consider what your park has to offer and be creative when you are planning a Junior Ranger program.

This guide has been developed as a reference tool for preparing and leading Junior Ranger programs. Almost all of the subject sections presented in the handbook include the following:

### Interesting Facts

These are bits of trivia you can use in your talk to help get the Junior Rangers interested in the subject.

## **The Sample Program**

This outlines one (or more) of the many possible ways a program might be organized. Since this handbook will be distributed to a wide variety of state parks, the sample programs generally do not include specific references to plant and animal species, types of rocks, California Indian groups, etc. (although in some sections park-specific sample programs have been included). The sample programs are provided to give you ideas and a place to start, but you can personalize them and adapt them to the specifics of your unit.

## **Activities**

Games, activities, and crafts have been included in many of the subject sections to help reinforce the program content and to involve the Junior Rangers in the program. Some of these activities and crafts can easily be incorporated into a self-guided workbook and serve as a way to get entire families involved. (Note: Additional activities are included in the "Directed Activities" section).

## **Subject Information**

This is a compilation of useful information that you may want to include in your program, modifying or embellishing it according to your park environment. As the information is very general, your program will be more effective if you find out more about your park's special features, plant and animal life, and history.

Concepts researched for use in this handbook were sometimes complex and difficult to "translate" into a language kids could understand. We hope to have spared you this "translation" problem by presenting the information simply, without cumbersome scientific words or concepts that may be difficult for 7- to 12-year-olds to understand.

## **Application/Conclusion**

Each sample program will end with an explicit or implicit stewardship application. It is important that the Junior Rangers think about how they can apply what they have learned, both while they are in the park and when they go back home. Junior Rangers should leave the program, or complete an activity, with the following concepts in mind:

- Understanding the relationship between each subject area and humans (interaction, exploitation);
- Understanding good stewardship in each subject area.

Example: If the Junior Rangers are learning about animal life, they should understand how they can help protect animals and endangered species while in the park, how actions back at home (such as construction in the neighborhood) can affect animals, and how actions around the world can affect biodiversity (for example, the effect of losing the rainforests).

## **Suggested Resources**

At the end of most sections, a list of books and other materials is included to help you prepare your program. (Note: There is also a more extensive list at the end of the handbook).

## **Other Sections**

### **Working with Children**

This section includes suggestions on how to get (and keep) the attention of a group of 7- to 12-year-olds, how to deal with troublesome children, and how to include children with special needs in your program.

### **Self-Guided Activities**

Self-guided activities can bring families together, allow for flexibility when visiting parks, and encourage exploration and learning. A “Junior Ranger Adventure Guide,” in both English and Spanish language versions, is available as a self-guided option for program participants. Parks are encouraged to develop their own park-specific self-guided workbooks. In Appendix A you will find “paper programs” designed for Junior Rangers to do on their own. These worksheets can be adapted to be park-specific and incorporated into a park workbook, or copied and given to Junior Rangers who ask for them to complete. The child should complete several paper activities before being eligible for a stamp in his or her logbook. See the introduction to “Self-Guided Activities” for more information.

## **Using the Handbook**

This handbook is not intended to be a reference book that sits on your shelf, gathering dust; rather, it is designed to be a “working handbook.” The three-ring binder format was selected so that you would be able to add your own sample programs, articles, games, reference materials, program notes, etc. to this book, and so that there would be space for periodic updates.

As you develop successful programs, activities, and games, please send them to the Interpretation and Education Division in Sacramento. Your ideas can then be shared with other interpreters and included in future updates. Your contributions and comments are welcome.

Because they are difficult to mass produce, tabs have not been included; however, you may find it easier to use the handbook if you add them.

We hope you find the handbook helpful. Good luck in preparing your Junior Ranger program!

## History of the Junior Ranger Program

Although the California Department of Parks and Recreation is a leader in the Junior Ranger Program movement in the United States, this type of program really had its beginnings in the late 1930s in the National Park Service. It was at Yosemite National Park in 1938 that park staff devised a new program that would come to be called the Junior Naturalist Program.

The goals of this new program were quite simple and sound very similar to those of the present day State Park System interpreter: "to make possible a children's program of interpretation to fit their specialized needs."

The program soon expanded within the National Park Service to Sequoia National Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, and the national historic sites of our nation's capital in and around Washington, D.C. The program became so important that it was included as a topic of discussion during the November 1940 Second Park Naturalist Conference at Grand Canyon National Park.

"Organized informality" became the theme of the first Junior Naturalist Program at Yosemite: "Through play, contests, activities, direct observation, and creative pursuits, children receive an insight and simple techniques in various fields of nature study."



These early leaders in interpretation wanted to provide children "a purpose of direction rather than building a thorough fund of knowledge." In other words, they wanted the program to be meaningful to young people without bearing any resemblance to the classroom regimen from which they had escaped for the summer. They wanted to show that, contrary to the 1930s stereotype of a naturalist being "a nut with a net," a naturalist was someone with an interest in and knowledge of the great outdoors and the desire to preserve the nation's scenic and cultural treasures.

In the early 1970s, the California Department of Parks and Recreation began its own pilot Junior Ranger Program. In 1973-74, the program was adopted and, over the years, expanded throughout the state. In 1991 a Junior Ranger logbook was added to the program, allowing children to record their experiences and to receive stamps for

programs attended. The self-guided Junior Ranger Adventure Guide was created in 2002 for parks that do not have staff to lead programs but still want to offer the Junior Ranger Program. Where properly organized and enthusiastically carried out, the Junior Ranger Program has become one of the most important and successful elements of state park interpretation.

## **Program Goals**

The Junior Ranger program should accomplish two primary goals:

- Provide an opportunity for children to participate in a fun, hands-on activity designed especially for them;
- Develop in children an appreciation for the cultural and natural resources preserved in state parks, an awareness of the interrelationship among those resources, and a desire to help protect them.

Every Junior Ranger activity should provide a worthwhile experience that promotes further thought and action by the child, rather than just instruction. Concepts should be simple, yet meaningful. Active involvement and participation by the children should be incorporated into each Junior Ranger activity.

The Junior Ranger program must be adapted to local resources, types of visitors and visitor use, and staffing and scheduling limitations. Units unable to have daily activities due to visitor use patterns or personnel limitations are still encouraged to have a Junior Ranger program. Activities should be scheduled for the days and seasons of highest visitation. To maintain a statewide program of the highest quality, it is important to follow the guidelines established in this handbook.

## **Program Guidelines**

### **Eligibility**

The Junior Ranger Program is primarily designed for children 7 to 12 years old. Children under seven are generally too young to participate fully and to assimilate the program material. At times, their presence disrupts the program and diminishes the effectiveness of the interpreter with the older participants. You might consider developing a Junior Ranger Cub Program geared toward children under seven. By the age of thirteen, most young people have passed into another stage of development and are apt to find the concepts presented in most programs below their intellectual level. Self-guided workbooks allow children of a wider age range to participate in Junior Rangers along with older siblings and adults.

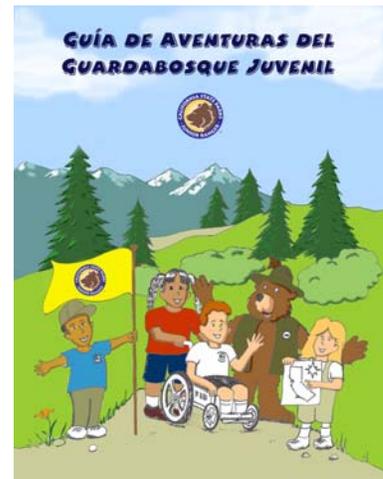
## **Study Segments and Electives**

There are twelve study segment areas: Geology, Native Californians, History, Plant Life, Animal Life, Energy, Water, Weather and Climate, Ecology, Park Careers, Recycling, and Safety and Survival/Crime Prevention. In addition to these, you may wish to develop a program on a topic of local or special interest, such as Oceanography, Archaeology, Astronomy, Architecture, Orienteering, Pioneer Crafts, etc. A page has been included in the logbook for special electives stamps.

Some state parks have developed profession-specific “Junior” programs (such as Junior Historian, Junior Engineer, Junior Curator) as a creative way for children to learn about other jobs available within state parks or about resources specific to a particular park unit. The Park Careers section of the Junior Ranger Handbook and logbook is an excellent place for these programs to be incorporated. These “Junior” programs can be created under the auspices of the larger Junior Ranger Program and utilize the Junior Ranger materials, awards, and awards structure. Staff who are developing profession-specific programs should report on, and request Junior Ranger supplies/awards for their program, through the Junior Ranger Program. Also, please send program information to the Interpretation and Education Division, attention: Junior Ranger Program Coordinator, so the program can be promoted statewide.

## **Self-Guided Activities**

Self-guided activities may be used in parks that currently do not offer Junior Ranger programs due to limited staffing or a day-use clientele or as an alternative for kids and their families who aren’t able to fit a conducted Junior Ranger program into their schedule. Some examples of self-guided activities are available in this handbook. These worksheets can be adapted to be park-specific or copied and provided to Junior Rangers who request them. The child should complete several of the self-guided worksheets before earning a stamp in their logbook. We also encourage you to develop self-guided activities that are based on the resources of your unit.



The “Junior Ranger Adventure Guide” is also a self-guided activity and is available in both English and Spanish. Upon completing the Junior Ranger Adventure Guide, a child should bring it to the kiosk or visitor center to receive a metal Junior Ranger badge. If a child wants to continue with Junior Rangers after completing the Adventure Guide, he or she can simply take the Guide to a park that conducts Junior Ranger programs. There a logbook will be issued and credit given for one activity. Copies of the Adventure Guide can be downloaded from the Department’s website or ordered from the Interpretation and Education Division.

## Recognition Awards

The Junior Ranger recognition awards were developed specifically for use in the Junior Ranger Program and should be used exclusively for this program. They should not be used for "Litter-Getter" or other service programs. To maintain program consistency and avoid the confusion and disappointment that arises when participants receive different awards from one park to another, the Junior Ranger awards are not to be supplemented with locally developed materials. Only official statewide awards are to be given out. In some parks, using local funding, park-specific versions of the statewide badge are available. These badges closely resemble the statewide badges and are an exception to the policy that locally-developed materials are not allowed. Please send samples of all park-specific badges to the Junior Ranger Program coordinator in the Interpretation and Education Division.

A Junior Ranger logbook will be issued to each participant at the first program he or she attends (See "Using the Junior Ranger Logbook"). Interpreters should stamp the appropriate section of the logbook when the child completes each portion of the program. When a Junior Ranger completes one program or self-guided workbook, he or she will have earned a metal Junior Ranger badge. Upon completion of five programs, a Junior Ranger poster is awarded; after ten programs, the participant receives a certificate and the Junior Ranger patch. The "Award Summary Page" of the logbook will help the Junior Ranger and the interpreter keep track of the awards a child has earned.



Statewide Badge



Park-Specific  
Badge



## Using the Junior Ranger Logbook



The Junior Ranger logbook has been designed to serve as a continuing record of a child's park visits and participation in the Junior Ranger Program, and is now also available in a Spanish format. The logbook can be kept and used from year to year. There is a place in the middle of the logbook where the young person can put a dot on a map of California to show the state parks he or she has visited. The logbook provides enough places to record a child's participation in a program in each category up to seven times. For example, if a child completes the Plant Life section at Sugar Pine Point State Park at Lake Tahoe, he or she can still get credit for the very different Plant Life program at Calaveras Big Trees on the next trip.

The logbook contains an identification page, the Junior Ranger pledge, and Junior Ranger responsibilities. You may want to have the participants say the pledge together at the beginning of each program and/or go over the responsibilities as a group and discuss why they are important.

For each Junior Ranger Program study area, there is an illustration, fun facts, space to write, and space to draw. You may want to incorporate the logbook into your program; for example, in a unit on weather you could ask the Junior Rangers to draw the different kinds of clouds on the "Electives/Special Projects" page. Alternatively, you could suggest that the children write about and draw pictures of what they learned in the program that day on their own using the weather and climate page. This can reinforce the program and give the group something to do after the Junior Ranger program is over. The questions and activities in the writing and drawing sections under each study area are provided as samples that you can change or adapt to match your program.

If your unit offers special Junior Ranger segments on Archaeology, Oceanography, Pioneer Crafts, etc., you can use the "electives" space to give the participants credit

for completing that segment. In addition, there is a page for self-guided activities (which children complete on their own). Please see the section on Self-Guided Activities in this handbook for more information about their use.

At the end of the logbook, there is a place where Junior Rangers can write down the addresses of new friends they meet, record special memories of their visits to state parks, identify the plants and animals they saw in the parks, and get autographs from park staff.

Finally, there is a page on which to keep track of the stamps and awards a junior ranger has earned. Should a child earn all the awards, he or she can be encouraged to start over again!

## **Promoting and Recording/Evaluating Your Program**

There should always be some degree of promotion going on for your programs. After all, the best program in the world won't have much of an impact on children visiting our parks if they don't know about it in the first place. Promotion can be done in a number of ways at a variety of venues. The most important thing may be simply to let other staff, and volunteers, at the park know about the program and when it will be offered. This way a park aid staffing a kiosk can let an arriving family know about it, a maintenance worker talking with a parent and child at the restroom can give a "plug" for it, a ranger who is doing a walk-through can give a personal reminder to campers he or she encounters, and a docent can tell those families with children who are on his or her general tour group about the opportunity for them to take part in your program as well (the same goes for a reminder at campfire programs). But these people can only do that if you keep them informed.

In order to do this, and to have something that can be provided to visitors, why not develop a simple calendar, or other handout, with information about your program (be sure to include the important information on when and where the program will be, how long it will last, and what the topic will be)? A supply of the handouts could be kept at the park's entrance kiosk and/or at a visitor center front desk. Be sure to post it on all bulletin boards that are available in the park as well. Did you know there is even a decorative "template" you can use for your bulletin board reminders? All you have to do is request it from the Department's Distribution and Reproduction Center (DARC). The template is on standard size paper and has a decorative, kid-friendly border. This can then be handwritten on, or run through an office printer, to convey any information you want. Ask for template "INT-201A" and be sure to tell them how many copies you want. Looking for something eye catching to promote the Junior Ranger program? A promotional poster is available through the Interpretation and Education Division.

If your programs are rather sporadic and therefore don't lend themselves to being "advertised" in this way, then at least look for ways to let visitors know (again

through word of mouth and postings throughout the park) that your programs are available and more information can be obtained from a specific source (be sure to specify how visitors can get that “more information”).

Adding a blurb to the park’s website would be ideal as well, for those families that take the time to peruse the park’s site in advance. General information about the availability of Junior Ranger programs at the park can also be added to the park’s printed materials.

Working with local news outlets is also a possibility. See the appendix for sample press releases you could use to help write one about your program.

With all the work that goes into the development, promotion, and presentation of your program, it can be easy to forget about the important follow up that should be done as well. Consider how to best have your program evaluated—whether by children in attendance, another staff person, your supervisor, or an interpreter from somewhere else in your district. And use the information obtained from those evaluations to make improvements in the future (otherwise you’re just wasting those people’s time). For a great source of advice on the subject of evaluations, and ideas for how to carry them out, see *Aiming for Excellence: An Evaluation Handbook for Interpretive Services in California State Parks* (which is available on the State Parks website, and can also be obtained from the Interpretation and Education Division).

Be sure to report the statistics for your program to the appropriate person so they can be recorded into the CAMP database for tracking purposes (this used to be done using the DPR 918 forms and then was folded into the CAMP program). Additionally, make sure your programs are a part of the maintenance tracking portion of CAMP, so there is a record of the maintenance needs for the program, most importantly materials and supplies that will need to be replenished periodically.

## **Tips for Program Success**

- The Junior Ranger Program is intended for children. Discourage adults from attending sessions.
- Have Junior Rangers recite the Junior Ranger pledge at the beginning of each session, to build group spirit and reinforce program goals.
- Fifteen is the recommended maximum number of participants per session. Where groups tend to get too large, consider posting sign-up sheets at the kiosk or visitor center. Whenever possible, schedule additional sessions rather than exceed the recommended maximum.

## *Junior Ranger Program Handbook: Introduction*

- Experiment with scheduling Junior Ranger activities at different times of day until you find the best time for your unit. Avoid the heat of the day, especially in units with water recreation. Early morning (9:00, 9:30, or 10:00 A.M.) or late afternoon (4:00 P.M.) times work well in units where visitors tend to be busy or leave the unit during the day. If personnel are available, Junior Ranger sessions could be scheduled at the same time as interpretive presentations geared to adults. In units with mostly weekend visitation, try offering two Saturday sessions.
- The recommended length of time for Junior Ranger sessions is 30-45 minutes. After sixty minutes the attention span of the 7- to 12-year-old child often begins to wane; an hour is the maximum recommended time for a program.
- If possible, have participants meet at the same location each day.
- Reassure parents that you will return to the same place at a specified time with their children and that they may watch from a distance if they have special concerns about safety.
- Take advantage of all opportunities to explain and publicize the program. Within the park, make use of bulletin boards, entrance station contacts, campfire programs, park publications, and patrol activities. Newspaper, radio, and television coverage should also be considered. (See sample press releases in Appendix D.)
- Whenever possible, present awards at campfire programs. Ask the district superintendent, chief ranger, or a visiting "V.I.P." to present them. You might have the participants describe, act out, or demonstrate some portion of what they learned.
- One person in each district should be responsible for coordinating the district's Junior Ranger program. Often this will be the District Interpretive Coordinator. This person's duties should include training personnel involved in the program, publicity, scheduling, ordering Junior Ranger materials from the Interpretation and Education Division in Sacramento, monitoring the program during the season, and preparing and submitting the district's annual evaluation forms.
- Use natural objects, appropriate artifacts, drawings, photographs, and other visual aids to support or illustrate concepts. Take a knapsack of props to the site with you.
- Try to keep the administrative paperwork simple and short. For example, do not issue logbooks at the beginning of a session only to collect them for signing at the end. Take advantage of the children's enthusiasm and anticipation at the opening of the session by starting your subject matter presentation. Give only a very brief introduction to the Junior Ranger Program. Avoid losing their interest with

*Junior Ranger Program Handbook: Introduction*

explanations of procedures, passing out and collecting papers, etc. Save these for the end of the session.

- Encourage other personnel such as lifeguards and maintenance workers to get involved with the program, presenting appropriate study segments or electives.