
The

Catalyst



The Newsletter for Interpretation in California State Parks

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The Accessibility Issue



A tactile model intended to clarify the complex architectural development of the Stanford Mansion for low vision guests and others is helpful for most visitors.



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Contributor's Guidelines

The Catalyst welcomes your original articles up to two pages in length. We prefer unpublished material, but will occasionally reprint items published elsewhere. Be sure to include information about the publication so we can get permission to use the material. You may submit an article at any time. Please include a photo whenever possible.

Our future guest editors and focuses are:

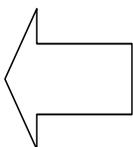
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We really appreciate items submitted on disk or by e-mail. Check with the Guest Editor for preferred file formats. Please send photos as separate files, not inserted into your document. You may also submit original photos or other illustrations to *The Catalyst*. All photos and artwork submitted will be returned promptly. We reserve the right to edit all material. Items are selected for publication solely at the discretion of the editor and publisher. We appreciate your suggestions.



Your Name could be here!

If you would like to guest-edit a future issue of *The Catalyst* on a topic of your choosing, contact Donna Pozzi at (916) 653-4643 or dpozz@parks.ca.gov.

From the Editor



Ray Bloomer of the National Center on Accessibility (NCA) explores the tactile model at the Leland Stanford Mansion SHP. Guest editor provides instruction. Details p. 18.

Carolyn Shimandle set the bar high for guest editors with an excellent issue on Environmental Living Programs. Sara Skinner's delightful Angel Island ELP retrospective confirmed the long-term value of ELPs. The in-depth interviews and reports were terrific. Good show! Nikki Combs will be up next with an issue on Docent Training, and Nancy Mendez follows with Cultural Landscape Interpretation. Submission details are on page 2.

As for this issue, I'm hoping to provide a broad overview of the Accessibility Program, from the lawsuit era to the Consent Decree (settlement) to the ongoing Transition Plan; to update you on some future plans for accessibility in State Parks; and to provide some accessibility ideas and resources that may be helpful.

We'll start out with a look back at how the Accessibility Section got started. No one is more able to tell that story than Linda Canar, Accessibility Program Manager from its 1999 inception to 2005. Linda is now a retired annuitant with the section.

New Accessibility Program Manager Christina Aceituno follows up with what's happening with the program now. Some translation of key terms sneaks into these pages as well.

Accessible Trails Coordinator Jason Spann and I offer an article on the Trail Plan, including ideas to get some trails beyond just physical access.

Joanie Cahill contributes a very helpful article on writing for a special audience. Her approach to creating Braille text for a nature trail at Anza Borrego Desert State Park will work in other places.

NPS Landscape Architect Leslie Jehnings completes the trails tales with her article on the accessibility-driven rehabilitation of a trail in the Cheeseboro/Palo Comado Canyon area of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

Ray Bloomer, NCA Director of Technical Assistance and Education, provides information and insights from the unique perspective of both a long-time accessible services provider and user. Ray has been blind since his teens.

Don Fox, former NPS Pacific West Region Accessibility Compliance Coordinator who is now a private consultant, chips in with Accessibility Etiquette and some tactile map tip resources. Don also took the photo at the left.

Neal Albritton, web guru and consultant, formerly with the Department of Rehabilitation, whips up 10 things your webmaster needs to know to meet accessibility guidelines. We tried to make it broadly understandable for English speakers, but it is intended for your tech folks.

Karen Barrett dares to test a developing exhibit at Jack London State Historic Park to see if it meets State Park guidelines for accessible lighting levels. Follow her voyage of discovery - and do try this at home in your park.

I've contributed some ideas on creating tactile models and accompanying "building" instructions for low vision users. Styrofoam can work for low-budget models.

Jenan Saunders concludes with a thoughtful article on making "videos" accessible, reminding us that the term doesn't just mean a VHS tape anymore.

The Master Interpreter, Interpreters' Resources, and Tapestry Sections are mostly accessibility-themed too. This is a lot to digest. I hope it's helpful. -PAT

What's Up?



Interpreters' Resources

Two Tactile Maps

From Don Fox, consultant

1. A couple years ago when I needed prop for a presentation, a park volunteer came up with an inexpensive tactile map. Using a glue gun, he applied a continuous bead to outline the park boundary, roads, and the location of specific features on the Yosemite park brochure. Literally within 5 minutes, Henk Parson produced a simple way to create a three-dimensional map useful for persons with low or no vision.

2. Jean Tessmer, Space Options, Inc., Kula, Hawaii, also needed to produce an inexpensive hand-held map so a client who is blind could navigate through an historic house. She found a way to adapt a computer driven vinyl cutting machine to "draw" a smooth raised-line floor plan. She replaced the cutter's knife with a ballpoint pen. The pen draws on a piece of 5 mil Mylar film, overlaid on a 1/8" rubber mat with a reversed, mirror image drawing between the Mylar and the mat. The result is a traced, embossed drawing. This technology has been used reliably for over 4 years. Contact Jean at: 808-878-8386. I have contacted Jean and am getting more information and some samples to see if this can be practical for simple maps or floor plans in our parks. I'll make the items available to both service centers. -PAT

Accessible Outdoors

In case you missed it, the October quarterly issue of *Bay Nature* magazine has an entire section (six articles) on outdoor accessibility. One chronicles a recent kayak trip to Angel Island State Park enjoyed by a group of Oakland students who are visually impaired. More details about the travel company and the trip are in the Tapestry section on page 21.

The issue (which also has a nice piece on Jack London SHP by retired DPR manager Greg Hayes) can be purchased online. You can also listen to a podcast of the issue for free. Here's the link: www.baynature.com

Here They Come: Segway Interpretive Tours at Angel Island

On a related note, guided Angel Island tours on rented Segways are under serious discussion for the coming year. These battery powered, two-wheel vehicles look like old push lawn mowers with a small platform to stand on. They tool along at speeds from 6-12mph or so, and are designed for those who cannot or will not walk for great distances. They are NOT accessibility vehicles, but a type of alternative personal transport that may prove very popular with an aging, mostly sedentary population. Deciding whether to permit such alternative personal vehicles in our parks is up to each superintendent. Segways are currently allowed at Benicia SRA.

Technology Aids Diversity

An article in *Teaching Tolerance* magazine (provided by Donna Pozzi) describes an interactive electronic program that connected two New York City schools with a **live** interpretive tour at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. The program was funded by a \$2000 Teaching Tolerance grant.

One of the schools, Henry Viscardi, is a kind of magnet school for students with severe physical disabilities. For these kids, physical access to the tenement-turned-museum's winding course of creaky stairs is not possible. The second group of kids, from the Drexel Avenue School, received some sensitivity training from Viscardi staff, then hosted the Viscardi students at Drexel and interacted live with the online tenement museum tour guide. Immigration studies combined with disability awareness for a great learning experience.

More details are at this link: www.tolerance.org/teach/magazine/grant.jsp?p=0&is=39

Dear Master Interpreter

Dear Master Interpreter,

My boss is after me to do a visitor survey. Any tips on getting started?

Survey Sue



Dear Sue,

Good for your boss for caring what your visitors think. A survey can be a useful tool to better understand your visitors. Read up on survey techniques and have a few colleagues review your survey structure before you go too far. But most importantly, don't place too much trust in what the surveys tell you. A full-scale visitor study takes survey data and compares it to personal interviews and detailed observations of visitor behavior. Recent research suggests surveys are not all that accurate. Visitors will grossly exaggerate the amount of time they report viewing interpretive materials. Also they often understand much more of your message than they are willing to write down on a survey form.

MI

Dear Master Interpreter,

Do you know anything about retail sales? We'd like to increase our co-op sales revenue at the visitor center. We have added lots of exciting new products and they are all displayed at the entrance to the building where people can not overlook them. What else can we do to generate sales?

Retail Randy

Dear Randy

All of the theme parks make me pass through a sales area, so you are off to a good start there. But are you aware of the "butt-brush" factor? Of course you already have nice, wide aisles for wheelchair access. But if you have a shopper in that aisle looking at merchandise and another visitor heads for the door brushing behind them, odds are they will stop shopping and move out of the aisle. Make sure shoppers have plenty of room for shopping that is out of the pathways and they will likely do more shopping. Also make sure your visitors know that dollars spent in your store support the park directly. This gives them a reason to spend more. Try to make your shop look professional. Find a store that's popular in your area and ask the manager if s/he would come and give you some tips on your retail design. You can really maximize sales by designing your displays correctly and this takes marketing research as well as artistic ability.

MI

Dear Master Interpreter,

We are re-doing our self-guided nature trail. Everyone is expecting an updated brochure to go with numbered posts but I have seen some really nice trails done with interpretive panels lately. Which is better, panels or brochures?

Trail Tim

Dear Tim,

It all depends. Panels will cost you more in the short run but very likely less in the long run. But there are a lot of factors to consider. Would panels detract from the site? Is

vandalism a problem in your unit?

Take a look at *Signs, Trails and Wayside Exhibits* (Gross, Buchholz and Zimmerman) to help decide. It says, "Leaflet and marker walking trails are seldom the most effective techniques for interpreting a site."

MI

Dear Master Interpreter,

My resource ecologist wants to re-do a little brochure they developed, and I have a chance to offer input. It looks a little like it was created by scientists without any interpreter or designer. How can I steer them right?

Brochure Bob

Dear Bob,

That can be tough! If they are committed to a brochure, and funding is tied to producing it, you can help them with interpretive writing and design. If they aren't that far along, you can help them more. Suggest first looking at the message and at the target audience, then developing good measurable objectives before considering what may be the best media to deliver that message.

MI

Dear Master Interpreter,

You won't believe this one! While visiting a Mayan temple in Central America, the interpreter pointed out all of the interesting features. When asked how old the temple was, the interpreter replied, "one thousand, five hundred and three years."

Amazed at the very precise date, we inquired how he could come up with such a number. "Easy," the interpreter answered, "an archaeologist told me the temple was 1,500 years old and that was three years ago."

Amused

The Accessibility Story
A Retrospective by Linda Canar,
Accessibility Manager, 1999-2005

The Accessibility Section celebrated its 7th anniversary this September. Although we were created in 1999, it seems like only a few years ago that we were beginning our efforts to survey all the state parks and establish a Transition Plan for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). It has been an interesting and sometimes difficult process to accomplish our required milestones.

In late 1998 a federal class action lawsuit was filed by Disability Rights Advocates. The pressure of this lawsuit helped the Department obtain funding to set up a complete program and administrative section to focus on ADA compliance in our parks.

This lawsuit, *Tucker v. California Department of Parks and Recreation*, was based on a group of complaints from individuals regarding access barriers in state parks. These general claims identified the Department's failure to provide reasonable accommodation to park visitors with disabilities. The list of issues included restrooms, parking, paths of travel, signage and displays, picnic tables, and trails. Specific complaints had also been received at various parks regarding lack of wheelchair accessible trails, lack of wheelchair access to a visitor center, and lack of alternate formats in exhibits.

During a court review of the Department's efforts toward ADA in 1999, it was shown that although the Department had made some progress in making some park programs and

facilities available under the ADA, a self-evaluation and barrier removal plan had not been completed. These two documents were specifically required under the ADA; the deadline for completion had been 1995.

In June 1999, a court order gave the Department exactly two years to evaluate every park and develop a plan for reaching compliance with the ADA. The plan was to include all park programs, facilities, trails, and activities. Fortunately we were successful in obtaining funding and staff for two years to complete this work. The tasks and short timelines were daunting, but those hired into the program in the fall of 1999 began the task of accomplishing these mandates.

After hiring and training staff, park surveys were conducted throughout the state and completed in December 2000. During the same time period surveys were also completed for the self-evaluation process and the Trail Plan. The Department's *Self-Evaluation Plan*, *Transition Plan*, and *Trail Plan* were completed and released for public review in October 2001.

In the *Transition Plan*, each state park is assigned a level based on visitation, the number of activities offered, the uniqueness of the programs, and geographic distribution. According to the plan, level 1 parks (the highest priority) are being improved first, followed by level 2, etc. These improvements include parking and restroom renovations, picnic area and campground improvements, improved pathways, and accessible trails, as well as better access to the park's educational and interpretive programs.

To complete the many small projects required and reduce costs, three small construction crews were set up and trained to complete various facility modifications throughout many of our parks. These Accessibility Construction Unit (ACU) crews have been traveling throughout the state and renovating campgrounds, pathways, and picnic areas. Larger projects are being designed by Department design staff or hired consultants and then contracted out to local construction companies.



First ACU Transition Plan project, Lake Oroville, 2002

A Consent Decree settling the lawsuit was signed in November 2005. It requires on-going oversight until the completion of the Transition Plan work in 2016. As a part of the Consent Decree, in addition to facilitating barrier removal projects, Accessibility Program staff independently review all park construction, interpretive, and trail projects to ensure that they meet access goals and ADA requirements. Accessibility staff also provide code interpretations and technical guidance for districts and designers regarding accessibility issues. To keep the public informed as accessibility improvements are completed, information on accessible features is provided on specially designed web pages. The Accessibility Section updates the pages.

June 30, 2006 marked the end of Year 4 of the 14-year Transition Plan Implementation Program. With the completion of this fiscal year, the Department has expended or committed approximately \$29 million of the projected \$112 million needed to complete its mandate. In the current fiscal year, \$11.8 million of funding is scheduled, and the pace of improvements continues to increase.

The main focus of the program over the last four years has been toward improving the more highly visited and diverse parks. Folsom Lake SRA, Lake Oroville SRA, Half Moon Bay SB, Brannan Island SRA, Clear Lake SP, Doheny SB, and others have received significant improvements.

Multiple trail projects are underway statewide, and the program is utilizing Department trail crews whenever possible. Accessible trail projects have been completed in several parks. New interpretive panels and renovated visitor centers feature more universal interpretive design.

We've made a lot of progress toward the Department's accessibility goals, but there is still a lot to be done. As the Transition Plan projects continue, the Department can be truly proud that it is providing opportunities for all park visitors.



Finished path in use, just days later. It leads into the water.

The Accessibility Story, Act II By Christina Aceituno Accessibility Manager, 2006

In November of 2005 the Department entered into an agreement that essentially settled the Tucker lawsuit and shifted the focus of the section dramatically. Previously, substantial resources were spent evaluating the programs and facilities of the Department and creating a plan to address deficiencies. However, with the settlement of the lawsuit, focus shifted to execution of the Transition Plan. Because this was a natural transition in the program, Linda Canar, who had managed the program from the start, opted to retire and pass the torch for the implementation of the Transition Plan—which is where I joined the cast. I joined the Accessibility Section in January 2006, and, with the continued support and hard work of the section staff, we have continued to move into the new era of the program.

State Parks and all named parties in the lawsuit identified 12 activities that encompass the diversity of programs in which park visitors may participate. Among the 12 activities, exhibits and interpretive programs were expressly identified. Thus, the Department is legally mandated to make interpretive programs and exhibits accessible to persons who are disabled. The "accessibility" of an exhibit or interpretive feature may include such things as physical access; height and mounting angle; controls; contrast, font sizes and styles; clear and concise text; alternative formats such as audio text, large font text, captions, and Braille; and accessibility aids such as magnifiers and listening assistance systems.

The Accessibility Section has grown to a staff of 29, mostly dedicated to barrier removal projects. Significant time and energy continue to be focused on the physical modifications or construction to make the physical facilities accessible. At this point in the program, only a small percentage of our resources are focused on accessible exhibits and interpretation. While interpretation is important, there are so many physical barriers to access in our parks that we have to focus on removing them in order to get visitors into the facilities so they can take part in our interpretive programs. Interpreters are fortunate to have the Interpretation and Education section's *All Visitors Welcome* source book for accessible interpretive techniques; we hope you each have downloaded a copy of this great tool, revised in 2003, available through the Adventures in Learning link on the State Parks home page.

Our interpretive efforts are currently geared toward reviewing proposed new interpretive panels, exhibits, and publications to ensure that they are accessibly designed. New programs must be accessible or have accessible equivalents, and we often discuss new tours or events with field staff. The Exhibits section of the *2005 State Parks Accessibility Guidelines* was updated and greatly expanded to include the best interpretive design practices available. Exhibit designers in the service centers and headquarters contributed to the Exhibit section.

State Parks' accessibility guidelines were further revised to make them more user friendly. They include more drawings, a glossary, and as much verbal clarity as legal guidelines

allow. Field staff continue to receive training in the still developing area of accessible interpretation.

The Departmental policy on Publications (DN 2000-07), and its related chapter in the Accessibility Guidelines, will also be expanded. I encourage all of you considering new panels, programs, and new interpretive projects to get in touch with the Accessibility Section (Pat Turse at 916-445-8953; pturs@parks.ca.gov) so we can get you started in the right direction and help ensure that your projects meet standards. You may already know this, but we do not charge for our reviews, and we are pretty speedy at completing them.

One exciting interpretive project underway is a "pilot" to enhance the interpretive components of an accessible trail so that visually impaired visitors can better experience the interpretation. At Mount San Jacinto State Park's Stone Creek Campground, we have created a physically accessible one-mile loop trail that winds through the pines, manzanita, and granite of the surrounding tranquil environment. Accessibility staff researched materials and designs that will allow a visitor who is blind to "see" some of the natural environment. We are currently working with the park interpreter and exhibit design staff to bring the project to life. We are optimistic that the community will embrace the innovation of this model trail and help us promote it to disabled visitors, especially to those who are visually impaired.

As the accessibility program unfolds in the area of interpretation at our parks and facilities, we would

appreciate your feedback. We know that interpreters make every effort to consider the diversity of our visitors and work very hard to create a park experience that is available to everyone. We look forward to working with you to ensure that visitors of all abilities are welcome.

Translating Accessibility - Speak By Pat Turse

Transition Plan: Strategy showing precisely how, when, and at what cost you intend to get from A to B. In our case, that meant how and what we planned to do to make our largely inaccessible (especially in 1999) parks programmatically accessible, when viewed as a whole. Transition plans always include great detail, proposed costs, and a timeline. Our *Transition Plan* focuses on the removal of physical barriers, while a separate *Self-Evaluation Plan* addresses barriers other than physical, such as policies and practices, that need to be changed.

Programmatic Access: It's not just facilities that must be accessible. Our park **programs** (major activities supported by staff and facilities) must be accessible. Accessible house tour programs require that key components, e.g., ticket purchase, visitor center, exhibits, video, house, and tour, are accessible. Interpreters and exhibit designers need to follow inclusive practices outlined in *All Visitors Welcome* as well as the *2005 CSP Accessibility Guidelines*. Not every program in every park has to be accessible, but new programs must be accessible or at least have accessible alternatives.

The Trail Plan: Moving Toward Full Access By Jason Spann Accessible Trails Coordinator

Part 1: The Trail Plan

California State Parks maintains over 1,500 trails that provide a wide variety of experiences to visitors. A 1999 court order required the Department to identify the trails within our parks, including any significant feature(-s) they lead to, the environment or experience they offer, and how accessible or potentially accessible they are.

Responding to the court order required legwork by district trails coordinators, usually field maintenance staff. They or their designees went off to their district's trails to complete surveys addressing topography, resource issues, safety, parking, routes from parking, and other elements. The data went into the first of many Trails databases. Over time, these initial surveys were significantly updated.

In resolving the lawsuit, the Department developed a Trail Plan to provide a variety of trail opportunities and experiences representative of the features found in our parks. The Plan attempts to balance resource protection with access. Like the Transition Plan, the Trail Plan includes projected costs, accessible trail mileage and location milestones, and expected completion dates. The accessible trails will offer various lengths and ranges of accessible slopes so that persons of all abilities can find the level of physical challenge and diversity of park experience they seek.

The Trail Plan, Part 2: Beyond Physical Access By Pat Turse

Creating fully accessible interpretive trails is a developing career area that may have potential for persons who enjoy challenges. Communicating the trail experience to people with low (or no) vision or other non-mobility-related disabilities seems to mostly be in the "under discussion" phase in most park systems, including our parks. It involves balancing the desire to communicate with issues that include safety, upkeep, and retaining the natural trail experience.



Off-trail explorers at Anza-Borrego Desert State Park

Although there were short Braille Trails in the 1980s, trail and program design now aim to be more inclusive instead of focusing on segregated groups. Braille alternatives may now be additions to written panels, rather than stand-alone "Trails for the Blind." See Joanie Cahill's article on the next page (10) for an excellent multi-sensory alternative to original nature trail text that was more visually oriented. The Braille could also have been provided as a paper handout.

Since under 10% of persons who are blind read Braille, the current

trend is toward using more descriptive audio text and/or tactile (raised) information, including tactile images and brief tactile text captions. Trail audiotext may include orienting information and pointers to sensory experiences beyond what may be included on trail panels.

Audio files with multi-sensory descriptive language that can be played on MP3 players, PDAs, and cell phones look like the future in communicating to audiences with low vision. These small personal devices are private, individually adjustable, and less disruptive of the natural environment than "talking" panels that play aloud with speakers.

Audio reaches a far wider audience than Braille, and these tactile panels with their brief, sensory language may prove popular with persons with cognitive or English language issues or with visitors who are more audio-oriented learners.

Providing some type of media player to those who don't have one requires a field person to check players in and out. Educational nature trails, often located near visitor centers, may be better suited (compared to trailheads out in the wild) to make media player loans feasible. Moreover, some educational nature trails, which focus on education more than the trail experience, may better communicate a specific park experience and message than some hiking trails.

State Parks has two model accessible trail projects geared to visitors with low vision on the drawing board—one this year, one in 2007. They will involve some raised

images and tactile text, most likely with some downloadable audio text, and, hopefully, audio players. Trail surface changes to help low vision users locate the exhibits are also under discussion. We see these two trails as models that can be tested, especially by persons with low vision, to help us learn what techniques are practical.

Stay tuned. We are still sifting through ideas for design elements that will be useful enhancements to the trail experience. Your comments and suggestions are welcome.

Money Talk by Linda Canar & Pat Turse

For the past five years, the Accessibility Section has received funding to complete the California State Parks Transition Plan. We expect to continue to receive funding each year if money is available. These dollars are specifically allocated for work identified in the Transition Plan or the Consent Decree (court settlement). The rising costs of construction and the additional projects required to finally settle the lawsuit may necessitate even more funding.

Other projects, no matter how worthy, that are not part of these two legal documents cannot be funded from the Accessibility Program budget. Even so, we'd like to hear about your proposed accessibility projects (funded or not) so that we can stay current with field needs and provide guidance where needed. We strongly encourage districts to give high priority to accessibility improvements with deferred maintenance funds.

**Writing for a Special Audience:
Nature Trail Text
for Persons with Low Vision
By Joanie S. Cahill
Interpretive Planner,
Anza-Borrego Desert State Park**

Put the visitor first, and you'll succeed. That's how I approach every interpretive project. Although each program or product is a balance between the resources, the visitor and the techniques I use, I've learned over the years that the visitor is the most important component. That is, it doesn't matter how great your information or story is if people aren't listening and engaged.

When we were asked to include Braille text on a series of wayside panels at the park, I was excited by the challenge. It never occurred to me to translate the original text into Braille. The original text was clearly designed for people with sight. I knew that I needed to create a completely different experience for blind or vision-impaired people.

The theme of the trail is A Field Guide to Anza-Borrego™. This is a particularly challenging trail because it is across open desert between the park's main campground and the visitor center. During the day, you could conceivably walk the trail without seeing anything but sand, holes, and dead-looking bushes. What we tried to do with the text was show people what they might see throughout their visit to the park, including the creatures that live in the holes and the amazing adaptations of the plants around them.

Obviously, blind people were not going to look at illustrations of birds



This Anza-Borrego trail panel includes a Braille version (the dark semi-circle) with multi-sensory text keyed to non-visual senses.

and reptiles and watch for them throughout their visit. So I started from the beginning. If I were blind, and I were to walk this trail, what would I want to know about? How would I experience the resources? I decided to focus on the senses of hearing and feeling/touch.

As I explored the trail with my eyes closed, it was obvious that I could feel the heat of the sun and the unevenness of the ground. I could hear birds calling and occasionally the rustle of a shrub. I tried to interpret these sounds and impressions as if I were describing them to someone who couldn't see. For example, where the panel for sighted people talks about the signs left behind by small mammals, the Braille text reads,

“You may hear a rustling in the shrubs as a Cottontail or Jackrabbit hops out of your way. They also make shallow depressions in the sand along the trail. Other small mammals that are active in the late

evening or early morning are the Ringtail, Spotted Skunk and Kit Fox.”

While the sighted version of the common shrubs panel focuses on what to look for, the Braille version concentrates on what they smell like:

“You'll notice many scents along this trail. Desert plants often have oily coatings on their leaves to help them retain their moisture. Each plant's oil gives off a different scent, especially when exposed to rain or mist. How many different scents can you detect along this trail?”

Good interpretive writing creates both emotional and intellectual connections to your resource. When you keep this in mind, and focus on the visitor and what they'd like to know, you'll be pleased with the results. This strategy works whether you're writing for children, adults or any “special” population, because every audience is special.

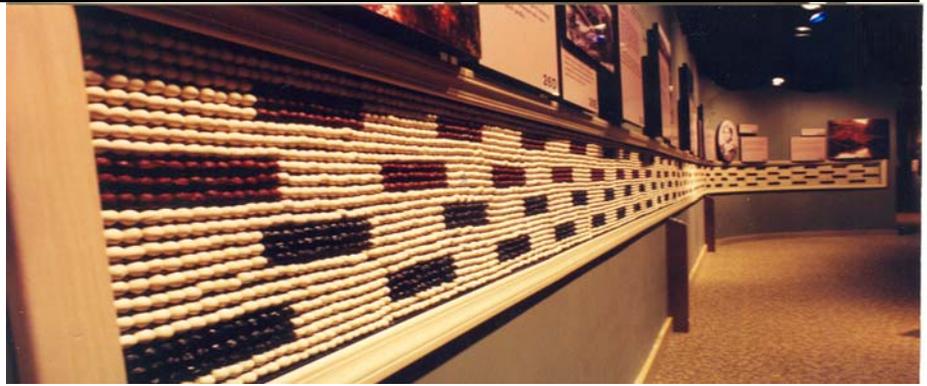
**Interview with Ray Bloomer
By Pat Turse**

How did you get started in the accessibility field and how did you end up with the National Center on Accessibility?

I started out with the National Park Service as an interpreter at Independence National Historic Park in Philadelphia. I was the first blind interpreter hired by NPS. While I was there, I noticed that when visitors with disabilities were present, park staff tended to speak to whoever was accompanying the disabled person instead of directly to the person that was disabled. People often did the same thing to me. I didn't like it when that happened; I didn't think other persons with disabilities did either.

So I began to do some research. That led to my developing some accessibility training materials, and after a few years I moved on to the Boston National Historic Park. Later I became the Disability Coordinator in the area's regional office. From there I moved on to open the Teddy Roosevelt estate at Sagamore Hills Historic Park, New York, where I was Chief Ranger. I become even more involved in training and developing accessibility materials there.

After the passage of the ADA, there was an emphasis on creating government agencies to help ensure accessible housing, transportation, and so on. There seemed to be a need for an agency that specialized in accessibility issues involved with parks and recreation. The National Center on Accessibility was created in 1992 to fill that void, and I became the Director of Technical Services and Education here.



At the Cherokee Heritage Center's Trail of Tears exhibit, beads of various textures, colors and shapes symbolize the fates of relocated persons.

Photo courtesy of the Cherokee Heritage Center

From your perspective, has disabled access improved more quickly than you expected, or more slowly? Or has it been a mix?

Well it's been kind of a mix. At first there may not have been many disabled visitors to parks. When places first started to add more accessibility, more people with disabilities began to show up. This led to more education and more training. Since then, we've had laws like Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and then the Americans with Disabilities Act. With each of those laws, it meant more attention, more education, more people responding. So it's almost like a catch-22 in the sense that as more access was developed, more people with disabilities were getting out and using the facilities, and in the process began demanding more. But it also meant that service providers saw the demand, and learned more about accessibility, so they began to provide more.

Change has taken place at a much more rapid pace over the past five years than it did in the previous five. I think it's because more people understand what their responsibilities are, what they have to do.

I've been involved in doing accessibility training for about 30 years, and I remember at first many people would be in a room because they were forced to go to the training. They'd be leaning back in their chair, with their arms crossed, and the feeling was, "You expect me to do WHAT in my park?" Now I'd say that in the training courses we have today it's very, very rare that people don't have a desire to be there, and they want to know how to do it better. It's not just, "Tell me what I have to do."

Q. What types of training courses does NCA offer, and are there any open classes?

We have two different types of training. The first type is open registration courses held in various parts of the country to enable people to have an opportunity without traveling too far. Those typically include a course called Retrofitting Accessibility, geared mostly to maintenance and design staff trying to make existing facilities accessible. Another course is for Accessibility Coordinators. It's a little bit of everything- the laws, indoor and outdoor recreation, playgrounds, exhibits, and so on. We have a Universal Approach to Interpretation

course. (Editor: Offered in Sacramento a few years back, this course was excellent.) We've had some open registration specialty courses on trails, on hunting and fishing, and on playgrounds.

We've also done courses for specific agencies tailored to specific agency needs. We've done them for just about all of the federal land management bureaus, state land agencies, and for NASA's various sites with visitor centers all across the country.

What types of services do you provide beyond training?

We specialize in three areas: technical assistance, research, and education and training. We've branched out a little more and become very involved in consulting including being involved in planning and development processes and doing facility assessments. So that's the broad range. Our research includes studies on trail surfaces, picnic areas, trails, beach surfaces, and swimming pools. We did the swimming pool access contract for the U.S. Access Board; about 85% of our work became part of the national standards for accessible pools.

It seems that there is a need for more research on accessible interpretation and exhibits. Lighthouse has done some work on contrasts, but is any research on the drawing board at NCA?

We've tried to get some research done in contrast for text, but also for matching up the relationships and ratios between lighting, contrast, [font] size, depth, and all potential factors that assist better readability for people with low vision. In the

long run the whole population always benefits from improvements in these areas.

Another study we want to do is in the area of modeling. What works with models? How large should they be? If you don't go with something that is totally three-dimensional, how much relief is necessary for certain types of subject matter? At what age do people learn certain things tactilely? Those kinds of topics are going to require resources, and I'm talking funding. We're still looking for more funding to be able to pull together some of the interpretive research that is needed.

Can you talk about the relationships between accessibility standards and universal design?

We and many other organizations that promote accessibility also promote universal design highly. When you're designing for accessibility, it means you've met the minimum standards that are required to accommodate people with disabilities, whether it's physical or programmatic. Again, it just means the minimum necessary so that the majority of people with disabilities may be able to use it. It doesn't mean they'll be able to use it easily, just that they may be able to use it functionally.

Universal design means that we've considered the total population, which includes people with disabilities. It has seven principles that focus on ability rather than disability. In the long run it means that a greater number of people will be able to benefit from the money and resources that went into a project. You can see we're very passionate about universal design.

It also does away with the need

for "disabled user only" sites or programs.

Even more than that, it eliminates the need for people [with disabilities] to self-identify. One of the examples that I often use is that people will have closed captions, meaning that when someone requests it, they can turn on the captions for audio visual materials. If "captions on" becomes the standard operating procedure, and we only turn them off by request, first, people don't have to request their civil rights. Second, there are a huge number of people who benefit from captions- including some with severe hearing loss- that will not self-identify, and [thus] would not benefit from the program unless "captions on" is standard. That means we're wasting money, and the program is not getting to those for whom it was intended.

Can you clarify what audio description is- especially as it relates to videos created to be shown in parks?

I've heard it referred to as the art of talking pictorially. Essentially, it's describing visual things or actions to people who are not seeing them, whether it's people who are blind or have low vision. We're also starting to find out that there's a greater benefit when all people are seeing the [on-screen text] audio description because it often points out things that even those who can see don't always notice, or things they may see but not quite digest.

Sometimes people ask what to describe in a video which is mostly spoken words against talking head images. In that case, if you have a 10-15 second gap in audio, you can state that a photo of John Smith is on

screen. It [the audio description] doesn't have to say that John Smith has a beard and a hat, and whatever. The fact that it's just him on screen, and not visuals of things he's talking about, is important to know.

It's very important to create a level playing field for people who are blind when it comes to understanding visual things. It doesn't end with audiovisual programs. Audio description could be used on a nature trail, in a museum, in varied applications.

Audio described trails could make use of various delivery systems. The latest may be delivering information using cell phones. You get to a certain spot where you know that you dial a number, and you get information. It could be everything from a general description of the environment to very specific plants or animal life or things that could occur in a

pond, stream, river or reservoir. There's a variety of things that could be done on a nature trail including the makeup of the trail itself.

As you've traveled around doing training and consulting, are there any particularly good accessible interpretive projects you can tell us about?

The Trail of Tears exhibit at the Cherokee Cultural Heritage Center in Talequah, Oklahoma includes a flat-mounted, tactile map of the trail that 16,000 forcibly relocated persons took. A kind of "wampum belt" leading along the walls of a room was installed as a tactile symbol of the people who were displaced. Native tribes fabricated beads in white for those who survived, in black for those who died, and in red for those who disappeared along the trail. Each bead color had a distinctive shape, which provided a great

tactile and visual interpretive concept.

A hands-on musket exhibit allowed people to lift up the musket enough to work with it. A cabin interior used objects that could be touched. Audio elements had LED print-outs for persons with hearing difficulties. John Conoboy of NPS led the project. The [Lyn] Henley Company of Topanga, California, did the installation, designed by William Maple. (www.henleycompany.com)

You have some good things right at home in California, such as the use of cameras and lifts at the Railroad Museum, and some good modeling techniques at the Stanford Mansion.

Thanks, Ray. We're exploring many options to work toward full access.

**Disability Etiquette
By Don Fox, Consultant**

1. Speak directly to a person with a disability rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter who may be present.
2. You may offer to shake hands when introduced. People with limited hand use or an artificial limb can usually shake hands and offering the left hand is an acceptable greeting.
3. When talking to someone with a visual disability, identify yourself and others. During a guided tour/walk, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen or ask for instructions.

5. Address people with disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others.
6. Do not touch someone's wheelchair. People with disabilities treat their chairs as extensions of their bodies. So do people with service animals or guide dogs. Never touch or distract a work animal without the owner's permission.
7. Listen attentively when talking with people who have difficulty speaking, and wait for them to finish. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, or a nod of the head. Never pretend to understand; instead repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.

8. When speaking with someone in a wheelchair, try to place yourself at eye level with that person, especially when you're speaking at length.

9. Tap a person who has a hearing disability on the shoulder or wave your hand to get his or her attention. If she/he can read your lips, try to face a light source. Never shout. Just speak in a normal tone.

10. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about this?" that seem to relate to a person's disability.

Don Fox, retired NPS Pacific West Region Accessibility Compliance Coordinator, founded Accessible Design Collaborative this year.

Ten Things Your Webmaster Needs to Know By Neal Albritton Web Accessibility Expert

Electronic and information technology standards described in federal Section 508 were adopted in California by Government Code 11135. They are a primary catalyst for change in many webmasters' focus and in how web sites are designed.

Section 508 requires a person with a disability to have access to web site information in a fashion equivalent in ease to someone who does not have a disability. More importantly, Section 508 standards require web sites to satisfy sixteen specific criteria for accessibility. When used with guidelines from the World Wide Web Consortium, the standards provide for universally accessible web pages that can be rich in design, content, and functionality.

The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) may provide additional protections to people with disabilities who depend on the Web to conduct business, communicate, or gather information. All things considered, it is of great importance that webmasters know how to create universally accessible websites for government clientele as well as for the general public. So here are ten things your webmaster should know:

1. Non-text elements, such as images, photographs, and space holders need to be described. "Alt" tags should be used with images that can be briefly described. This tag relays critical information visitors without disabilities are expected to gather, often a

concise visual description. (**See photo and alt text below.**) Use the "LONGDESC" when images require a more complex explanation. Blank images used as a space holder should have empty "alt" tags, i.e., (alt="").



Alt text: A pier with lowered railing areas for wheelchair fishing is available at Folsom Lake's Nimbus Flats area.

2. Tables are commonly designed in a fashion that is not accessible to persons who use screen reader technology. Many forms typically present information in a multi-level, complicated fashion that is difficult to understand without sight. Accessible tables require each row and column header to be identified in the data table. Appropriate markup should be used to associate data cells and header cells for data tables that have two or more logical levels of row or column headers. (**See illustration at right.**)

3. Navigation should be simplified by minimizing redundant navigation links and providing a "skip to" navigation link. Redundant links are repeated links and can be very annoying because screen readers have to go through them over and over. Using a banner with the same

label at the top of every page or having the same navigation links on every page is redundant. Test by tabbing through your pages and noting duplicate links that can be deleted.

Provide a "skip to navigation" feature. The "skip to" link should be the first thing a person visiting the page arrives at, placed conveniently at the top left corner of the page before any other content.

4. Web pages should be designed so that all information conveyed with color is also available without color. The website should not rely on color alone to convey meaning. Nor should there be animated .gif images or distracting Flash content that can make navigation difficult and sometimes impossible for a screen reader.

A safe rule of thumb is to limit repetition to no more than two cycles; otherwise you should allow the web page visitor the option to turn off the image. Always avoid causing the screen to flicker with a frequency greater than 2 Hz and lower than 55 Hz to avoid inducing seizure activity among users who have epilepsy.

5. Multimedia. Always provide synchronized captioning or transcripts for multimedia files and video files. When a web page requires an applet, plug-in, or other application (for example, Acrobat Reader or a media player) to receive page content, provide a link to the plug-in that is accessible and provides adequate instructions to download and install.

6. PDF (Portable Document Format) files should be used with caution since they are often and easily

rendered inaccessible. Adobe has only recently realized they need to fix this. Meanwhile, instead of using PDF files for online documents, consider converting them to HTML or plain text documents.

7. A text-only page, with equivalent information or functionality, should only be used on the rare occasion when website compliance cannot be accomplished in any other way. Since text-only content must be updated whenever the original web page changes, this can save work.

8. Test for web page issues caused by browser type and version differences, since browsers may interpret standard HTML elements differently. Accessibility features, style sheet support, and deprecated or obsolete code elements should be checked.

9. Test the website by turning off all images and style sheets. Try changing the font size to the largest custom font size available, then resizing the browser window. Also try to navigate using only the keyboard. Press the Tab key to move through the links and see if the link text tells you where the link will take you. Turn off all sounds, and disable all applets and scripts. View the page on a monitor set to black & white resolution, and print the page on a black & white printer or set a color monitor to high contrast. Then view your site in a text-only format. Turn off "Play Animations." All this should give you a better idea of how your site works for various users.

10. Web pages should be regularly tested by people with different types of disabilities. Web pages must be retested whenever created or edited.

Editor's Note: Your local Society for the Blind or a similar organization may have a computer skills teacher who might evaluate your web site so it can be more helpful to low vision users. The Sacramento Society for the Blind helps me with the Accessible Features pages.

If every webmaster follows these ten rules, many more people with disabilities will have an opportunity to appreciate the Web. There will be less chance for costly litigation

Neal Albritton is a consultant and a subject-matter expert regarding Accessible Web Design. He played a key role in developing Section 508-related policy in Maine and California. Neal is the lead accessibility expert and a member of the IOUCA (web accessibility) Working Group. See Neal's contact email at the top right of this page.

Accessible Online Tables

Site Visits

	Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Jan	10	26	156
Feb	12	67	477
Mar	25	123	899

If the header cells in the "online" chart are not correctly coded, a screen reader would read, "Site visits, empty cell, year one, year two, year three; January, 10, 26, 156; February, 12, 67, 477" and so on. Without correct coding, screen readers cannot relate the data cells to the header columns.

Accessible Web Design Help for State Park pages

If your webmaster has a quick accessibility question or two, including questions about this article, Neal Albritton will provide courtesy help for State Parks web pages as time permits. He works for the State and has his own consulting firm, so he's hard to catch, but he does reply. Contact him at neal@albritton.us.



Logo of WebAIM, a helpful web site for accessible web design

This site, www.webaim.org, is still the best I've found for their use of plain English. The "Articles" tab at the top of the page lists a wealth of materials grouped by topic. Tucked under the heading "HTML Accessibility" is an article on "Appropriate Alternative Text" that gives pointers on correctly writing Alt text equivalents for images, something you or a volunteer may want to do some day.

More Web & Telecommunications: www.trace.wisc.edu

The Trace Research and Development Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison develops telecommunications products and software usable by people with disabilities. The web site can be fairly technical but offers some good tools, including free online tutorials for web designers.

**The Cheeseboro Canyon Project:
An NPS Accessible Trail
By Leslie Jehnings**

The two-lane road leading to Cheeseboro Canyon in the Simi Hills of Ventura County seems to enter a time warp. The huge oaks and rural feel are unexpected so close to Los Angeles. One of the last remaining somewhat intact farming and ranching sites left in the Southern California landscape, Cheeseboro/Palo Comado Canyon has the dubious distinction of being the only National Park site with a county landfill immediately adjacent to it. Remarkably, the backcountry offers outstanding opportunities to view abundant wildlife, experience incredible views, and wander amid historic ranch remnants. The trail currently supports about 100,000 visitors a year, including equestrians, mountain bikers, and hikers.

Longtime area rancher Clifford Holmes used to wander this area. He loved Cheeseboro and lower Liberty Canyon, and spent a great deal of time here with friends, beginning in the early 1940s. Holmes was semi-disabled and decided to leave some of his estate to fund an accessible trail so that youngsters with disabilities could enjoy the site. His estate was in fact received by the National Park Fund, and Cheeseboro, part of the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, will offer the accessible trail Holmes wanted.

The accessible trail will travel 1.3 miles to the historic ranch house, meandering through a shady corridor along most of Cheeseboro Canyon and Palo Comado Creek. A small "pedestrian only" bridge to be built



**Even unrestored, the Cheeseboro Creek picnic area is idyllic.
Photo, 2001, courtesy National Park Service**

across the creek will provide alternative loop routes to allow diverse levels of challenge. Trail users will experience a wonderfully wide range of landscapes, including oak-studded woodlands, rocky knolls, and riparian bottoms with stands of sage and native grasses. Wayside interpretive stations will each reflect a different theme and highlight a special nearby feature, incorporated into the site furnishings, signage and interpretive programs. Panels and overlooks will sit on wooden platforms at ground level.

The trailhead will get a new visitor contact station with accessible parking and restrooms. Picnic tables and interpretive displays will be set into shaded areas nearby. Another parking lot south of the main entry will provide disabled visitors with additional access to the trail, and offer an alternate easier second loop trail to the northeast.

Another idea being considered is how to provide the trail experience to those whose disabilities are not mobility-related. Utilizing pre-programmed devices -something be-

tween a cell phone and a PDA- may allow visitors with visual or cognitive disabilities guide themselves through interpretive programs on many subjects, wherever they want to be. Research into this element of the trail interpretation continues.

The construction of this trail and its planned alternative loop routes will be an important step forward for Cheeseboro and the Santa Monica Mountains Recreation Area. The progressive set of improvements will rehabilitate worn site features that are still heavily used and provide exciting new opportunities for interpretation and education accessible to all.

Leslie Jehnings is a landscape architect with the National Park Service in the Santa Monica Mountains Recreation Area. She has a strong interest in accessible trail design and presented plans for this project at the Interagency Interpretive Workshop, "Interpreting to Diverse Audiences," in Pacific Palisades in January, 2006.

Shedding Light on the Matter: Resolving Low Light Conditions in the Jack London Cottage

By Karen J. Barrett
Regional Interpretive Specialist
Diablo Vista District

At Jack London State Historic Park (JLSHP) a project to restore the home of author Jack London and his wife Charmian and develop their cottage into a house museum was undertaken by California State Parks' Northern Service Center (NSC). A field check of interpretive panel proofs provided an unexpected yet enlightening lesson in accessibility, historic lighting and interpretive planning.

The Cottage was planned and furnished so that visitors may experience the home as a reflection of the fascinating life and enduring work of this adventuresome couple through a self-guided tour. Interpretation is enhanced through attractively designed, graphically interesting interpretive panels with clearly stated themes, and succinctly and accurately worded text. Panels were reviewed and approved by the Accessibility Unit and met guidelines for color, contrast, captions, readability and font choice.

Is it just me, or is it dark in here?

Arrival of the panel proofs at the park was greatly anticipated and represented months of work by the NSC and JLSHP teams. When the JLSHP team conducted a field check of panel placement with the panel sized proofs, we could barely read the text! The proofs were perfect; it was just too dark in the rooms to easily read them.



Turning lights on in the Jack London Study (left) and Packing Room enhanced light levels (lux) significantly. Photos: Carol Dodge

The cottage was lit with historically accurate overhead features installed prior to this project. The project's Interpretive and Furnishing Plan called for panels but the challenge of reading them in low light levels had not been considered. Perhaps it was overlooked because the Cottage has many windows and some rooms are most often flooded with natural light.

In Search of a Bright Idea

Our first step was to inform the NSC. Then District Curator II Carol Dodge and I documented the light levels at panel locations. Next I updated Diablo Vista District Superintendent Don Monahan. Soon we were in a conference call with the NSC team.

The Cottage light levels were very low. The lowest panel location level was 11 lux and the highest was 63 lux. (Lux is a measurement of light.) According to the "Exhibits" chapter of 2005 California State Parks Accessibility Guidelines, the minimum light level to meet accessibility guidelines is 100 lux. The chapter provides direction when conservation requirements prohibit attaining this level.

To meet the challenge we researched museum-appropriate design. For example, Exhibit Designers Don Amos and Bill Bell and I discussed

incorporating technologically new LED lights into panel mounts (eliminated due to budget constraints) and back lighting panels (inappropriate due to accessibility impacts).

A Light Bulb Goes On!

During an on-site meeting NSC staff proposed adding to the Interpretive and Furnishing Plan, and the District approved. NSC Curators Chris Swiden and Katie Metraux then purchased and strategically placed period appropriate desk and floor lamps and replaced modern bulbs in overhead fixtures in places where the bulbs would not visually impact the historic scene. Just prior to the cottage opening, light levels were re-measured; the lowest panel location light level improved to 31 lux and the highest to 94 lux.

To help compensate for low light and to provide alternate format information, the NSC will provide the District with a CD of interpretive panel content. A binder of the material can be printed and kept on-site to facilitate enjoyment of the exhibit by visitors who are visually impaired and others who may want a closer look at the panel. Editor's Note: Since this article was submitted, the Northern Service Center has added more lamps to other cottage areas.

Enlightenment Attained, Pass it On

At the London Cottage our work shed light on a challenge the interpretive plan hadn't addressed. As you create your next project make sure your brilliant ideas shine by including an assessment of existing conditions, reviewing accessibility guidelines, and field testing media.

Wondering How to Measure Light Levels?

Using a light meter is relatively simple. Check with your district's Curator or Museum Collections Manager as they may have one. Read the instruction book, test it and practice before going to the field. Carol had located a (uncredited) chart that gives light level ranges for work areas. This was helpful because it gave me something to assess my skill by. For example, when the measurement of the light from my desk lamp was within an appropriate range (750 to 1,500 lux), I knew I was probably using the meter correctly.

Use two people when taking readings. One person operates the light meter and the other person records the levels. To follow proper scientific method, note the date, time and other relevant information. Because of the numerous windows of the Cottage and its orientation in relationship to the western horizon, I also noted the season.

-KJB

"Building" the Stanford Mansion: Models & How to Use Them By Pat Turse Accessibility Section



Ray Bloomer finishes "building" the Stanford Mansion

For the twelve years that I worked at the Stanford Mansion, I desperately wanted someone to build a model. It would have helped pre-restoration visitors understand the very complex building history of the the Mansion. Early sections, built at various times, were jacked up and sandwiched between new upper and lower floors.

So when staff at the Northern Service Center and the Sacramento District were discussing ideas to make the restored mansion more accessible for persons who are visually impaired, the model was an easy choice; it would help everyone. Exhibit Designer Bill Bell designed it with input from me, and a foam prototype was tested by low vision clients at the Sacramento Society for the Blind before the final wooden version was built by contract.

Architectural models that are to be used by people with little or no vision have definite construction requirements. Your model needs to include tactile elements that aid in

perceiving key details. For example, the Stanford Mansion has many features that lend themselves to tactile interpretation, including a flat-topped mansard roof with steep side slopes, oval windows, and a horse-shoe front staircase. Tactile versions of these features help visitors relate certain shapes to locations on the structure and to construction dates the instructor provides.

Raised floor plans, in sections corresponding to the model's pieces, are separated by incised grooves to provide a critical sense of the structure's footprint. The Stanford Mansion model also includes raised street names to help all visitors "see" the site plan. Tactile letters must be uppercase and large enough to be easily felt.

Architectural models intended for users with little or no vision need carefully organized instructions. Begin by guiding an overview touch of the building that allows people to see the architectural elements and where they fit. Knowing how the finished structure "looks" enables visitors to know how to re-assemble it after taking it apart. Give instructions in logical order; watch and listen to see if they are clear to your "builder." Have builders check to be sure components are aligned. Ask sighted people to test the instructions with their eyes closed, and then ask people who have low or no vision to test them. You may make many changes before you finish. I still make changes to my directions.

Various staff who use the model with blind guests will modify original instructions, but there should always be order and consistency.

If a Picture's Worth a Thousand Words, What About a Video?
by Jenan Saunders
Interpretation and Education

As you might imagine, there are many accessibility issues wrapped up in the whole arena of video technology. Let's start with some basics. First, when you hear the word "video," do not automatically think "VHS tape." Perhaps because VHS tapes were the predominant video format used for the last couple of decades, the two terms have become merged in many people's minds. I can't tell you how many times I've asked someone about a video and they've said something like "No, I'm talking about a DVD." So we need to think about the term "video" as the content (what's on it), rather than the physical format itself (what it's on).

Okay, with that out of the way, let's talk about accessibility as it relates to videos. There are two basic avenues for this discussion: how we can use video to make our parks and our resources more accessible, and how we can make the videos themselves more accessible to our visitors with disabilities. These are two very different issues, but both are worthy of consideration.

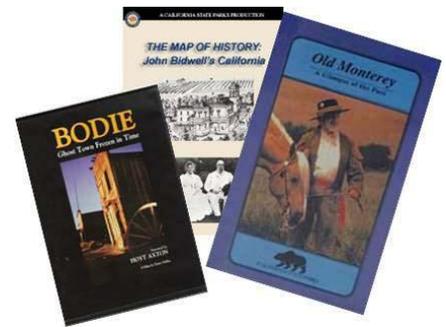
Videos can, and often should, be used to help make the resources of our parks, and our interpretive programs about those resources, more accessible. For example, we might film a video of an area in the park that cannot reasonably be made physically accessible to visitors with mobility impairments. Or we might film a tour that goes to an upper floor of a building without an elevator or lift

lift as a way to make that tour available to those whose disability may keep them from getting to that floor. But, it is also important to note that under the law, a video is only considered a temporary substitute for providing actual physical access to an area, so don't think of it as a final solution. It's just intended to get us through until we can provide that physical access.

However, such videos can be useful to teachers; they can be a way to prepare students before a field trip to a particular park. A video that takes visitors to a place in the park that's difficult to access could also be used by families that have limited time to spend at the park and just wouldn't be able to see that location otherwise. I think you get the point: videos made for purposes of providing access to places and programs can be beneficial not just to those with disabilities but for all our visitors.

While videos can help provide access that would not otherwise be possible, they can also have their own accessibility problems—most notably, but not by any means exclusively, for those with visual and hearing impairments. First and foremost, all our videos need to be captioned. This is the law, and a Department policy. There are basically three types of captions.

Open captions appear on the screen at all times and cannot be turned off. They are essentially placed right over the image of the video itself and are part of the visual information being sent to the projector, or whatever is "showing" the video. Because open captions are



part of the video image, they can have a variety of fonts, sizes and formats. However, it's very important to note that they must be easily readable, in sans serif font, and sentence case rather than all caps.

Closed captions can be turned on and off, usually by going through the menu for the monitor showing the video, since it's the monitor that decodes the closed captioning signal and allows it to show on the screen. Because closed captioning is something that needs to be decoded by a monitor, options for the appearance of such captions are much more limited. Closed captions must meet certain standards of size and appearance in order to allow any monitor to decode them. Editor's note: Closed captions are losing favor because they require people to self-identify as disabled. See Bloomer, p.12.

Subtitles, which are specific to videos in DVD format only, operate much like closed captions in that they also can be turned on and off; however, that's where the similarities end. Unlike closed captioning, which is a signal that is being constantly sent to the monitor and decoded when the captions are turned on, subtitles are decoded by the DVD player itself, and are therefore turned on and off by using the DVD player's

menu or subtitle button.

At this time, any of these captioning options may be used in our parks. However, if you choose to go with closed captions or subtitles, it is absolutely imperative that all staff and volunteers who may be operating the equipment know how to quickly turn on captions. Always keep an easy to follow "how to" sheet with the equipment. Notices must be posted in conspicuous locations to let visitors know captions are available upon request. Ideally a button could be set up that would allow visitors to turn on captions themselves. This works best for subtitled DVDs since the button can be hooked up to the DVD player and set up to only turn subtitles on and off.

When it comes to captions, it is very, very easy to make mistakes. To avoid mistakes, the first rule is, "Do not depend on outside contractors to get the captions correct." Contractors may not know how to spell unusual place, animal, or people names. They also may not be as exact with their punctuation as we may like. So always make sure that you check, double check, and triple check the transcript before it's used to place captions or subtitles on a video.

I make a point of getting the transcript in electronic format and finalizing it myself before sending it back to a contractor as "good to go." I still watch the captioned video all the way through to make sure the transcript was applied accurately. Sometimes contractors will take it upon themselves to "fix" something without realizing it was already the way you wanted it. We

had one who decided to go through and capitalize all plant and animal names in a whole slew of videos; when we caught the error, the contractor had to redo them all at his own cost.

How about accessibility when it comes to people with visual impairments? If you think about it, a video is made up of two sensory signals: what you're hearing and what you're seeing. Together they transmit the experience of a video. Just try playing an entire video with your eyes closed, and you'll see how difficult it can be to know what's going on. This is where audio description comes in.

Audio description is essentially a separate audio track on a video that can be turned on and off, like the Second Audio Program, or SAP, option for many television programs or like the director's comments option on some DVDs. Many television stations are now using a trademarked service known as Descriptive Video Service, or DVS, so you may also see this acronym used in some media. The "down time" between dialog or narration is where descriptions of visual content are placed. Since that time can be very limited, audio description focuses on those visual images (or unexplained sounds- editor) that are necessary to full understanding.

We realize that as a department we're a long way from getting to the point where all our videos are audio described as well as having dialog and narration captioned. However, that's no reason to not be thinking about it now. The best way to make a video visually accessible is to write

descriptions of important visual aspects of the video into the script itself, so they're part of the narration. If you're dealing with a video that's already been produced, sit and listen to it without looking. Note when you feel lost or confused. Get a transcript of the video and edit in descriptions of what's going on visually. Make your audio description available for use by staff and volunteers. After they are familiar with the new transcript, they can sit with a visitor who is visually impaired and quietly read them the audio descriptions during down times in the narration. Be sure to post a notice letting

Finally, it's important to note that a few "extras" offered for use with a video can help those visitors who have other disabilities that might interfere with their experience, such as learning disabilities. A general outline of the video can assist such visitors to better follow along with its content. A list of important terms and their definitions can also be helpful, as can a list of resources (books, other videos, websites) for more information on the topic of the video. As you might imagine, all of these types of resources can also be useful to other visitors, such as parents, teachers, and those with limited English skills.

For better or worse, videos are more and more becoming a normal part of the visitor experience in many of our parks. It's up to us to make that experience worthwhile. Integral to that charge is ensuring that our videos are accessible to all.

California's Tapestry

A Diversity Feature Article

Fall/Winter 2006-2007



Environmental Travel Companions at Angel Island by Pat Turse

Photos courtesy of ETC

Environmental Travel Companions (ETC, www.etc.org) is a San Francisco nonprofit specializing in helping youngsters of all abilities experience the outdoors. Thirty per cent of their programs are geared to youth at risk who aren't disabled. Most of the youthful travelers come from low income areas, and sliding fees keep costs low. Fundraisers and the use of many volunteers help keep organizational costs low.

Angel Island State Park has become a favorite ETC location. Kayak trips followed by overnights on the island are very popular. The company transports youngsters and their accessibility equipment to and from the island. ETC staff interpret the natural and cultural history of the island, using materials gathered from park staff and elsewhere. They look forward to bringing youngsters to the renovated Immigration Center.

A recent trip with five legally blind Oakland school youths was featured in the October *Bay Nature* magazine. The kids paddled across Raccoon Strait, explored old bunkers, hiked to the beach, learned about the food chain with a rousing game of Predator and Prey, and made some very special memories.



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