
The
Catalyst



The Newsletter for Interpretation in California State Parks

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\$\$\$ The Money Issue \$\$\$





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For address changes or additional subscriptions, call or email the Interpretation and Education Division:

916.654.2249
or
interp@parks.ca.gov

Guest Editor: Constance Gordon,
Interpreter I
PORTS Distance Learning
San Luis Obispo Coast District
805.927.2189
cgordon@parks.ca.gov

Publisher: Donna Pozzi
Interpretation & Education
916.653-4643
dpozz@parks.ca.gov

Copy Editor: John Werminski
Interpretation & Education
916.653.8959

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 We prefer unpublished material, but will occasionally reprint items published elsewhere.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 photograph whenever possible.

We really appreciate items submitted on CD or by email. We can read most DOS/Windows file formats. Please send photographs as separate files, not inserted into your document. You may also submit original photographs 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. ☞

Guest Editors Wanted!

Are you looking for an opportunity to work with other writers on engaging interpretive topics? Would you like to develop and challenge your creative and technical skills? Then consider becoming a Guest Editor for an upcoming issue of *The Catalyst*. Among the topics we're planning for future issues are:

Interpretation and Technology
Interpreting Climate Change

Please contact **Donna Pozzi** with your ideas,
dpozz@parks.ca.gov.

New Word—Can You Guess?

The word of the year in 2008 described the attempt to maximize gas mileage by making fuel-conserving adjustments to one's car and one's driving techniques. That's according to the *Oxford American Dictionary*.



This word was included in *Time* magazine's "Top Ten Green Stories." It beat out terms like "stay-cation." If you do this, you keep your tires perfectly inflated, kill the engine at a stoplight, turn off the air conditioning and drive at a steady speed with as little rapid acceleration or deceleration as possible.

Do you know this money-saving word?

(The word is *hypermiling*.)

From the Guest Editor



Photo by Debbie George

Constance Gordon is an Interpreter I in charge of PORTS for the San Luis Obispo Coast District. Before that, she was a Hearst Castle guide for five years. Before that, she worked in media for more than 25 years, mostly in radio and television. Now **parks** are her passion.

It has been so much fun working on this issue of *The Catalyst*. We have a stellar line-up of contributors to help you cope with budget cuts. You will:

- ✓ Find out how cuts will likely affect State Parks training;
- ✓ Be motivated to use your park to fight an epidemic...not H1N1...but obesity;
- ✓ Discover the reason you should watch TV the week of October 19;
- ✓ Learn ways to collaborate with nearby parks in tough economic times;

- ✓ Realize how the signs of our times really can be low cost;
- ✓ Be inspired by the First Lady so that you can inspire others;
- ✓ Uncover solutions to tricky times with tourists from the Master Interpreter;
- ✓ Understand why you should tweet or maybe podcast;
- ✓ And marvel at what Jane Goodall put under her pillow when she was only two years old.

It's all here...and more. Enjoy! ☘

Fixing What Ails State Parks

There are many people involved in looking for long-term solutions to fix what ails California State Parks—namely, our reliance on the ebbs and flows of the State's General Fund, which in turn rises and falls in line with tax revenues. However, getting off the General Fund "train" is no easy feat, and there isn't a simple answer to the question of how to go about doing it.

On one front is the idea of a State Park Access Pass. The pass would put in place a surcharge on registration fees for all non-commercial vehicles in the state. In exchange, vehicles with California plates would get free day-use access to state parks.

Oregon has a similar fee; Michigan is considering one; and in Montana, if vehicle owners want

to opt out of this fee, they must sign an agreement not to visit state parks.

If the Access Pass were to be put in place, it would provide enough funding to take us off the General Fund in perpetuity (or as long as the surcharge remains in place).

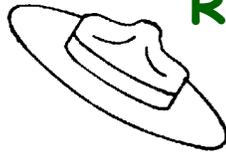


On another front, the Department is also looking for private companies and organizations who would be willing to become sponsors of State Parks. Sponsors would be given certain types of recognition such as on the web or in promotional materials, but without putting in jeopardy our core mission and values.

Although we've been successful in locating sponsors for specific projects, finding companies interested in funding the State Park System in general, especially in the current economic climate, is understandably difficult.

We don't know what the future may hold for our Department, but it's comforting to know there are many people working hard to ensure the long-term sustainability of this magnificent State Park System. ☘

What's Up?



Resources for Interpreters

📁 **Podcasting by Mike Connolly**

📁 **Social Networking by Constance Gordon**

In these days of dismal budgets, it's time to put your computer to work. California State Parks interpreters must keep up with communications technology because it can be effectively used to connect young people to our natural and cultural resources. It is something you can do despite a shrinking budget.

Podcasting

If your computer works, podcasting is free!

Remember how challenging it could be to produce an interpretive audio program way back in the 20th century? Back then, creating audio programs as interpretive tools was always a technical challenge. While some park districts could afford to hire professional studios, others simply crossed their fingers and hoped for a seasonal park aide who also worked nights at the local radio station.

You might already have heard of or been involved with the production of the podcasts available from the California State Parks Foundation website (www.calparks.org/podcasts).

The word "podcast" is a portmanteau of "iPod" and "broadcast," though you do not need one of Apple's popular digital media players to listen to a podcast or to an mp3 digital audio program.

With the wealth of free computer software tools available today, any interpreter can produce a quality digital audio program on the office computer.

Take a look at Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>) for Windows or GarageBand (www.apple.com/ilife/garageband)

for Mac. If you have any doubts about the relevance and success of podcasting, browse the tens of thousands of free podcasts being downloaded right now via the iTunes Music Service (www.apple.com/itunes).

When creating a digital audio program or podcast for your park location to supplement your interpretive programming, here are some things to consider:

Location

Should a listener be in your park to enjoy the program or can it stand alone? For example, I created a digital audio program on CDRs (inexpensive recordable CDs) for visitors to listen to in their cars while driving from my visitor center to a trailhead. When the visitors come out of their cars, they have smiles on their faces and are eager to join me on my guided interpretive walk.



Time and Resources

Do you have both the time and the resources to build a true "podcast," or just a digital audio program? The term "podcast" suggests that you're planning a web-downloadable series of audio programs. Podcasts can earn "subscribers" and they are designed for a non-captive audience.

The Audience

How will the public receive your program? Interpreters can give out digital audio programs on CDRs at

appropriate visitor contact points – just be sure to record the CDs in ".wav" format so they can be played on any CD player.

Try working with local park partners to see if they can host your podcasts on their web pages.

If your district can spare a compatible telephone line, your audio program can be incorporated into the voicemail system at your park. Then visitors can call a telephone number posted out in the field and listen to your program on their cell phones.

A modern interpretive panel design that I have seen recently incorporates Microsoft Digital Tags (www.microsoft.com/tag), so that visitors can use their smart phones (e.g. Blackberry, iPhone) to link directly to online podcast programs.

You could even sell the CDs in your park's visitor center. Add fabulous photos, vivid videos or sensational sound effects to create a souvenir DVD and a new source of income, but be sure to observe intellectual property protocol.

Audience Survey

Don't forget to incorporate a way to receive feedback to your audio program from listeners.

Building a quality digital audio program is a modern, low-cost method for interpreting to park visitors. As you read this sentence, there are hundreds (perhaps thousands) of people listening to digital media players in our park lands. Do you have something to share with them? ☛

Mike Connolly is a State Park Interpreter I in the San Luis Obispo Coast District. You can find him at the Coastal Discovery Center at San Simeon Bay, across Highway 1 from Hearst Castle.

Social Networks

Observe someone in their teens or twenties for very long and you're sure to see thumbs flying on a communication device. They're texting to friends or commenting on a web site—so why not use this to your advantage by marketing your park on social networking sites? Use the sites like electronic billboards to drive people to your web site, where they will find detailed information about your park.

A little communication history: It took 38 years for radio to reach 50 million listeners; TV took 13 years to reach the same number of viewers; and the internet shortened that to four years according to the United Nations *Cyberschoolbus* document. Apple claims the iPod hit 50 million users in just three years. Facebook, a social networking site, added **100 million users in less than nine months.**

Obviously there has been a fundamental shift in how we communicate.



If Facebook were a country, it would be the world's fourth largest behind China, India and the United States, says Eric Qualman, author of *Socialnomics*. And it isn't just for young people who consider email passé. The *Inside Facebook* blog claims the fastest growing segment on the site is females from 55–65 years old.

So where do you start? Change the way you market your park. Qualman says, "successful companies in social media act more like party planners, aggregators and content providers" rather than traditional advertisers. Remember, people meet and marry on these sites.

Keep your web site. It answers most questions consumers want to know (in-depth information about your park), says Justin Couto of Couto Solutions. Invest your time and money on that web site, not on the social networking sites, advises Couto. The popularity of social net-

working sites can change (anyone still using MySpace?) or your favorite might start charging money.

There are a variety of social networking choices. Select one or two as your park's central sites. Then post a profile on the other social networking sites to refer viewers to your main sites.

Sign up for all of your social networks through a designated email account. According to Stever Robbins, the Get-It-Done Guy, this keeps your business email clear of clutter and provides a single place to access social networking activity.

If you plan to use the same message on multiple sites, Robbins suggests using hellotxt.com or Ping.fm to minimize the time you spend posting. These sites can send the same message to all the sites you're using.

A Case Study

The California State Parks Foundation's Facebook page grew from 517 fans at the end of May to more than 45,000 fans in mid-August.

CSPF has a link on its Facebook fan page for current friends to suggest to others that they join. This can be done with the click of a mouse and is very effective.

For example, on June 1, CSPF posted this update: "The Legislature will start to discuss park closures tomorrow." It gained 3,369 new fans in just one day.

"A tight deadline always spurs action," says Brenna Holmes, the online account executive at Adams Hussey & Associates (AH&A), architects of the Save Our State Parks campaign.

CSPF posts daily updates on its Facebook homepage. Most of the updates give supporters the latest news, but they also send acknowledgements as well as links. For example, a link might be posted to download signs for an event.

Finally, an Action Center was created on CSPF's web site to promote issue awareness and discussion, to encourage new activists,

and to convert fans to paying members. Emergency donation requests and online petitions are posted there.




Advantages to Twitter

First, you must be concise. Tweets are limited to 140 characters. They should be strategic messages, not throwaways like, "Good morning." Qualman says 80 percent of tweets were read or sent from mobile devices. Keep it simple. And don't tweet too often. You don't want to be considered spam.

A big Twitter advantage is TweetDeck, adds Couto. You can use it to search for anyone who mentions the name of your park, even on another site, and then invite them to become a fan.

Universal McCann's *Social Media Research Wave 3* claims 34% of bloggers post opinions about products and brands. Those who post undoubtedly include visitors who just toured your museum or stayed in your campground. Don't you want to know what they said?

Advantages to Facebook

You can create a larger presence than with Twitter. You can post a photo or virtual tour of your park or a series of photos showing a project in progress. You could hold a photo contest among visitors, let fans vote, then post an album of the winning pictures. You can post event details.



Advantages to LinkedIn

95 percent of companies who use social networks to assess potential employees use LinkedIn, according to the Jobvite *Social Recruitment Survey*. Couto says he posts information about his business on LinkedIn while personal, fun posts go on Facebook.

All three sites are free. All you need to do is start posting. ☛

Text Translation

If you're going to try Twitter, you'll need to learn a new language. With a limit of 140 characters, spelling goes out the window and many tweets contain creative abbreviations.

AML	All My Love	LY	Love You
ATB	All the Best	M8	Mate
AWHFY	Are We Having Fun Yet?	MC	Merry Christmas
BBFN	Bye Bye for Now	MGB	May God Bless
BBS	Be Back Soon	MYOB	Mind Your Own Business
BCNU	Be Seen' You	N	No
BF	Boyfriend	NA	No Access
BFF	Best Friends Forever	NBG	No Big Deal
BRB	Be Right Back	NC	No Comment
BTW	By the Way	NE	Any
CU	See You	NE1	Anyone
CUIMD	See You in My Dreams	NO1	No one
CUL8R	See You Later	NP	No Problem
DK	Don't Know	NWO	No Way Out
DUR?	Do You Remember?	O4U	Only for You
EOD	End of Discussion	OIC	Oh, I See
XLNT	Excellent	OTOH	On the Other Hand
EZ	Easy	PCM	Please Call Me
4	For	PPL	People
F2F	Face to Face	PLZ	Please (or PLS)
F2T	Free to Talk	PWB	Please Write Back
FITB	Fill in the Blank	QT	Cutie
FYEO	For Your Eyes Only	R	Are
FYA	For Your Amusement	ROTFL	Roll on the Floor Laughing
FWIW	For What It's Worth	RU?	Are You?
FYI	For Your Information	RUOK?	Are You OK?
GF	Girlfriend	SETE	Smiling Ear to Ear
GL	Good Luck	SO	Significant Other
G2G	Got to Go	SOL	Sooner or Later
GR8	Great	SRY	Sorry
H8	Hate	SUP	What's Up?
HAGN	Have a Good Night	STR8	Straight
HAND	Have a Nice Day	T+	Think Positive
HT4U	Hot for You	T2GO	Time to Go
H&K	Hugs and Kisses	T2UL	Talk to You Later
IC	I See	TBD	To Be Decided
IDK	I Don't Know	2DAY	Today
ILU	I Love You	THX	Thanks
IMHO	In My Humble Opinion	TIC	Tongue in Cheek
IMI	I Mean It	TMI	Too Much Information
IMO	In My Opinion	2MORO	Tomorrow
IOW	In Other Words	2NITE	Tonight
J4F	Just for Fun	TY	Thank You
JFK	Just for Kicks	TYVM	Thank You Very Much
JK	Just Kidding	UR	You Are
K	Okay	URT1	You Are the One
KC	Keep Cool	W4U	Waiting for You
KHUF	Know How You Feel	WE	Whatever
KOTC	Kiss on the Cheek	WRK	Work
KOTL	Kiss on the Lips	WTG!	Way to Go!
L8	Late	WUWH	Wish You Were Here
L8R	Later	X!	Typical Woman!
LOL	Laughing Out Loud	X	Kiss
		Y!	Typical Man
		Y?	Why?
		YBS	You'll Be Sorry

Prescription: Parks!

from a July 28 *Time Magazine*

Article Written by Bryan Walsh

"A new and growing group of psychologists believes that many of our modern-day mental problems, including depression, stress and anxiety, can be traced in part to society's increasing alienation from nature," according to a July 28 article in *Time* magazine. Practitioners of the burgeoning field of ecotherapy believe that patient care must include time spent outdoors. Linda Buzzell-Saltzman, a psychologist and founder of the International Association for Ecotherapy, says, "It's psychotherapy—as if nature really mattered."

Ecotherapists point out that human beings have evolved in synchrony with nature for millions of years and we are hard-wired to interact with our environment. In the past two centuries, beginning with the Industrial Revolution, people have been steadily removed from the natural world. With the rise of the internet and technologies like iPhones and Blackberrys, it's gotten worse, pushing us even further from our natural surroundings.

"We began to get the impression that we were somehow above and separate from nature," says Craig Chalquist, an instructor at John F. Kennedy University in San Francisco and co-editor of *Ecotherapy: Healing with Nature in Mind*.

In the article, Walsh writes that "today more than half of the world's population lives in cities, and many people barely ever get a glimpse of green." What the average person feels as stress or depression, ecotherapists suggest might be a longing for nature.

Treatment typically begins with a nature journal, in which patients record how much time they spend outside. It can be shocking to learn some of them spend less than 15 to 30 minutes a day in the great outdoors. Therapy sessions can take place in a park, rather than an office. Patients are counseled to reconnect with nature by hiking, gardening, or simply taking a walk in the park.

A 2007 study by researchers at the University of Essex in England found that a daily dose of walking outside could be as effective as taking antidepressant drugs for treating mild to moderate depression. The article points out that a similar regimen of walking in a crowded shopping mall did not have the same impact.

"We can use the natural world to be part of the healing process," says Chalquist. This prescription could benefit State Parks and not add to the anxiety of patients suffering from depression with the expense of pill bills at the pharmacy. ☪

United We Serve by Margo Cowan

“People are ready to answer the call to serve.”
~ First Lady Michelle Obama



The spotlight on volunteering and community service shone brightly on First Lady Michelle Obama as she issued an inspirational call to service at the June National Conference on Volunteering and Service in San Francisco. More than 5,000 listeners broke attendance records at the annual event.

In opening the conference, the First Lady announced the launch of United We Serve, an initiative to expand the size and impact of volunteer efforts in America.

“This, more than anything, is the key point I want to make today—this new administration doesn’t view service as separate from our national priorities. We believe that the only way to build that new foundation for our economy is to establish a new role for service in this country,” she said. “We know that many folks are eager to give back. We’ve seen it. They are eager to be part of this nation’s recovery and renewal. People are ready to answer the call to serve. We just need to issue that call and provide them with the opportunities that are meaningful.”

View the video of the ceremony at: <http://californiavolunteers.org/index.php/nosub/conference>.

The initial phase of the United We Serve campaign ran for 81 days,

from June 22 through September 11, which marked a new National Day of Service and Remembrance. In her remarks, Mrs. Obama announced the involvement of the Entertainment Industry Foundation to help spread the message. During the week of October 19, plots and themes of dozens of popular network television programs center on volunteering, further inspiring Americans to serve.

Joining the First Lady on the program was a glittering cast including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and California First Lady Maria Shriver, journalist Arianna Huffington, entertainer Jon Bon Jovi, and actor Matthew McConaughey. Speaker Pelosi highlighted new service opportunities created by the Edward M. Kennedy Service Act. “In these times of great challenge, America needs more people like all of you – rolling up your sleeves and pitching in to turn challenges in your communities into opportunities to serve. I come here proud of what Congress has done in a bipartisan way to help provide those opportunities.”

On the United We Serve website, <http://www.serve.gov>, President Barack Obama explains how to promote volunteer opportunities:

“I’m calling on all of you to make volunteerism and community service part of your daily life and the life of this nation. And when I say ‘all,’ I mean everyone – young and old, from every background, all across this country. We need individuals, community organizations, corporations, foundations, and our government to be part of this effort . . . If you have an idea for a project – like getting a group together to volunteer each week at a homeless shelter, or read to kids at your local library, or pick up trash in a local park – you can go online and register. The website has everything you need to get started.”

California First Lady Maria Shriver spoke convincingly of the work done by California Volunteers, the state agency led by Secretary Karen Baker aimed at increasing

the number of Californians engaged in service. Through the California Volunteer Matching Network, hosted at CaliforniaVolunteers.org, individuals and families can connect to meaningful volunteer opportunities in their communities using an online matching system.

By signing a partner agreement with one of the local volunteer connector agencies, park districts can take advantage of statewide marketing efforts and connector tools for recruiting volunteers through opportunities listed online with partners of California Volunteers. To identify a connector agency in your region, visit http://www.californiavolunteers.org/index.php/Volunteering_in_CA/detail2/. Volunteer opportunities posted to the California Volunteer Matching Network are uploaded daily to the United We Serve website.



The marquee message from the national conference was bold and clear:

“Volunteering is hip. It’s cool. Join the movement to usher in a new age of service in America. Connect. Engage. Serve.” ☪

Margo Cowan has been Volunteers in Parks Program Coordinator since late 2003. She is constantly inspired by the dedication and creativity of State Parks volunteers.

Ways to Manage Two Crises— Childhood Obesity and Budget Cuts by Liz Caldwell

Health, Inspiration, and Education – these are the directives of our Mission Statement.

And we do outstanding jobs using Inspiration with Education. But we also have an opportunity to use Inspiration for Health. This was never more important than now, with the epidemic of childhood obesity.

USA Today reported that a newly released CDC study finds that the medical bills for an obese patient are 41.5% more than for a patient of standard weight and calls obesity the single biggest reason for increases in health care costs. Taxpayers picked up half the \$147 billion tab in 2008 through Medicare and Medicaid. National Public

Radio reports serious complications from Type I diabetes can be reduced to 1% with proactive strategies such as diet and exercise.

Former President Bill Clinton urges homes, neighborhoods, schools, and communities to confront the obesity problem. State Parks interpreters have a wonderful opportunity to confront obesity and to provide park visitors with other health benefits at the same time.

In 2005, Richard Louv wrote an eloquent book entitled *Last Child in the Woods*. Study after study documented the need, value, and benefit of natural, green, transcendental

experiences for children. The benefits include reduced stress plus increased social interactions and the creation of social support by making friends. Louv identified studies in multiple countries that found children engage in more creative forms of play in green areas, as opposed to manufactured play areas.

which provide a beneficial influence in reducing the effects of childhood obesity.

Our strategy can be to inspire children to enjoy themselves outside, in nature, in our parks. We can motivate them to leave their computers once in awhile and head outside to play. California State Parks can

contribute to better health by providing an inspiring location for outdoor activities.

In these times of financial hardship, virtually all of our nature-based state parks are low cost or free. And what could be better? Joy, improved health, a bargain for the whole family.

Morro Bay State Park provides a good example of healthy inspiration, utilizing physical activity along with youth

education. Four site-specific topics are available for youth education programs. These are tied to California State Frameworks and Standards for Science and Social Science. Each topic includes rotations through four different activities, two of which involve outdoor walks.

One walk is along Morro Bay's shoreline, looking for organisms in the estuary's food chain. This, and its mud, is a favorite with the children. (Photo on page 9.) The walk extends to the Heron Rookery, with audio and olfactory experiences during nesting season. (0.75 mile with two hills, 74 and 57 feet each.)



Children on Top of White's Point. Photographer: Carol Moss

North Carolina State professor Robin Moore reports that children live through their senses...and the natural environment is the principal source of sensory stimulation.

Pioneering primatologist Jane Goodall slept with earthworms under her pillow as a two-year-old. Children's author Beatrix Potter was an enthusiastic nature collector as a child.

The inspirational aspect of the natural settings in our parks provides the leverage to influence health in positive ways. This can include increased physical activity levels,

The other outside activity climbs steps to the top of White's Point. This is a dacite formation overlooking the estuary, the sand spit, Morro Rock, the Pacific Ocean, and the Heron Rookery. The children feel a thrill of accomplishment from the challenge of the 30-foot climb, 0.21-mile walk. Plus they are awed at the panorama displayed before them. (See photo on page 8.)



Three boys and Sue Fong digging in mud on salt flat. Photographer: Barb Renshaw

Monthly for three years, Morro Bay State Park has also provided short interpretive walks to White's Point, specifically designed to attract families. These are attended by 6-10 people and quite a few children.

One of my most thrilling school group moments was when a young boy asked how to get a map. He lived about 150 miles away and wanted his father to drive his whole family back to see all this. That is the inspiration we want to leverage.

During the last year, 3,400 children in 82 different youth or school groups attended docent programs at Morro Bay State Park. Many schools travel more than 150 miles from the Central Valley, giving some students their first view of the coast.

There are repeat visits from many schools. The demand for these programs is greater than the available docents can provide, which is a measure of success.

The importance of this effort is emphasized in the following feedback.

From a Third Grade Teacher:

"... My students...kept telling me days afterward how much they enjoyed their experiences there. There is nothing better than life experiences to teach our children appreciation of the natural world"

—Cindy Evans,
Adam School, Santa Maria



Group hiking single file through grassland. Photographer: Barb Renshaw

From a Second Grade Student (and possible future interpreter):

"Really I enjoyed every little bit of it. I would kill to have a job like that. It must be very relaxing."

This exceptional program is totally docent run, including development of technical resource materials, training, grant writing, and coordination. Between them, the two coordinators have more than 6,000 hours and 16 years volunteering for the program.

Recently, two successful grants were written to create a major new middle school initiative. This became possible when retired science teachers became docents and recruited other scientists to help. Active partnerships now include a federal agency, a middle school, and a Kids' Camp.

Since 2007, Morro Bay has received:

- 🐟 \$10,000 Whale Tail grant in April 2009 from the California Coastal Commission;
- 🐟 Two grants from the Robert Janssen Foundation, administered by the SLO County Community Foundation, for operating expenses and docent training;
- 🐟 \$275 donation in June 2009 from Madison Elementary School in Sanger.

Other funding:

- 🐟 Central Coast Natural History Association (the cooperating association);
- 🐟 Pacific Gas & Electric;
- 🐟 Dorothy Upton School Grants.

Morro Bay docents do an incredible amount to ensure children (and their parents) connect with nature using limited outside funding. One key to successful interpretation in these days of draconian budget cuts might be to enlist many, many highly motivated and talented volunteers. ☘

Liz Caldwell is a Guide I and librarian at Hearst Castle and she volunteers at Morro Bay State Park.

Pick a Panel, Any Panel ~ Maximize Your Interpretive Dollars with the Park Panel Program by Jenan Saunders

In an ideal world, there would be people to provide interpretation at all the significant points of contact in a park. Visitors would have a chance to interact with these individuals and learn from them the value and significance of the resources to be found there. Or, in a slightly less ideal world, there would at least be funding to create interpretive panels specific to a unit and its resources, to help visitors understand the distinct qualities of the place and therefore better appreciate and care for it. But, this isn't an ideal world (or even close to it), and sometimes compromises are the way we get the most out of what we've got.

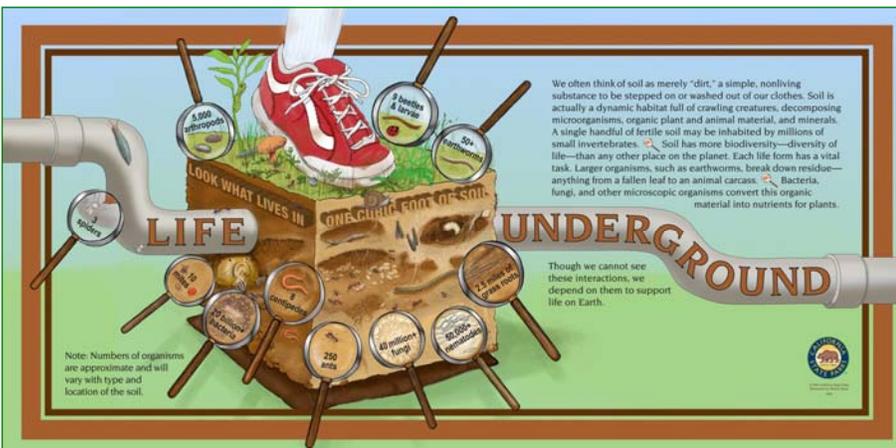
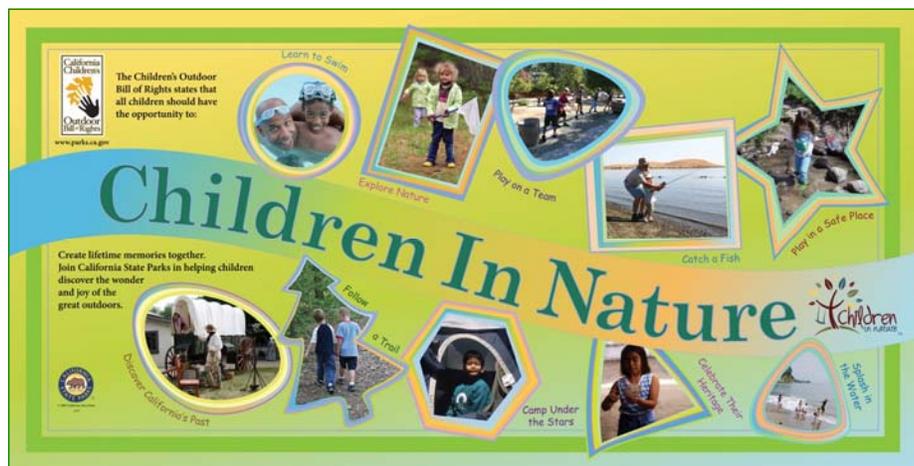
So, your funding is low but the need for interpretation is still there. And

fabrication (which is usually the least expensive part of the panel production process), housing (if needed) and installation.

The Interpretation and Education Division manages this program, and

the vendor doing the fabrication, and processing the purchasing paperwork.

Panel topics are selected based on a couple of factors: Subjects that are applicable to a large number of



At left and above are samples of panels available for your park through the Interpretation and Education Division.

park units, and subjects the Department feels are most in need of being interpreted for our visitors, usually based on park management issues, safety, or timeliness. Samples of just a few of the panels available through the program are shown here, but you can see the entire list of what's available (and view PDFs of each of the panels) at www.parks.ca.gov/parkpanels.

with money for staff and contractors shrinking by the day, how do you provide the interpretation your visitors need and deserve? One way is by taking advantage of the Park Panel Program. The program offers panels on topics of general interest for a wide variety of park uses. These panels have already been researched, written, designed, and reviewed, so all you're paying for is

it works very closely with staff in the Natural Resources, Archaeology, History and Museums, and Law Enforcement and Emergency Services Divisions in the development of the panels available through the program. The panels are also reviewed and approved by the Accessibility Section. The Interpretation and Education Division even handles getting bids, coordinating with

As funding allows, the Interpretation and Education Division adds panels to the program, and a number of new ones have been developed over the last couple of months—so if you haven't been to the webpage in a while, you might be pleasantly surprised at what you find there.

In addition, at the discretion of the Interpretation and Education Divi-

sion, panel text and graphics can be substituted to address issues at a specific park unit or in a specific region—however, additional staff time required to make the changes may need to be funded by the requestor.

Each of the panels is available in 32" x 40" format (which fits in our standard shelters) and 24" x 48" format (the program's set size for the low-profile type of panel). You can request panels be fabricated in either embedded fiberglass or high-pressure laminate. Embedded fiberglass is less expensive, but not as long-lasting or as brilliant in color as high-pressure laminate.

Order forms for requesting panels are available on the program's webpage (there are two versions: one

relatively low-cost interpretation for your visitors. We also offer the panels to non-State Parks entities, so feel free to spread the word about the program to your colleagues in other organizations. Contact the Interpretive Publications Section at (916) 654-2249 or publications@parks.ca.gov with any questions.

This program replaces what had previously been known as the "Generic Panel Program," and the www.parks.ca.gov/parkpanels webpage replaces the "Generic Panel Catalog." The panels shown in that catalog are no longer available for purchase and copies of the catalog should be discarded (or clearly marked as "no longer available" if you are retaining the catalog for your files). Many of the panels in

Cooperating Association Ideas

Here are some ideas from the FLAT-HEAD Nonprofit Development Partnership for your park's nonprofit, which is likely down in donations and perhaps membership renewals:

1. Make it easier to give, offer three-year memberships at a discount;
2. Create a sliding scale for memberships, maybe based on age with 100 being zero; 75 being 25%, 50 being 50%, etc.
3. Suggest memberships as gifts for birthdays or in memory of a loved one;
4. Without panic, focus on major donors to show appreciation and honor their financial commitment in these tough economic times. ☛

Survey Says

From an editorial in the *Sacramento Bee*:

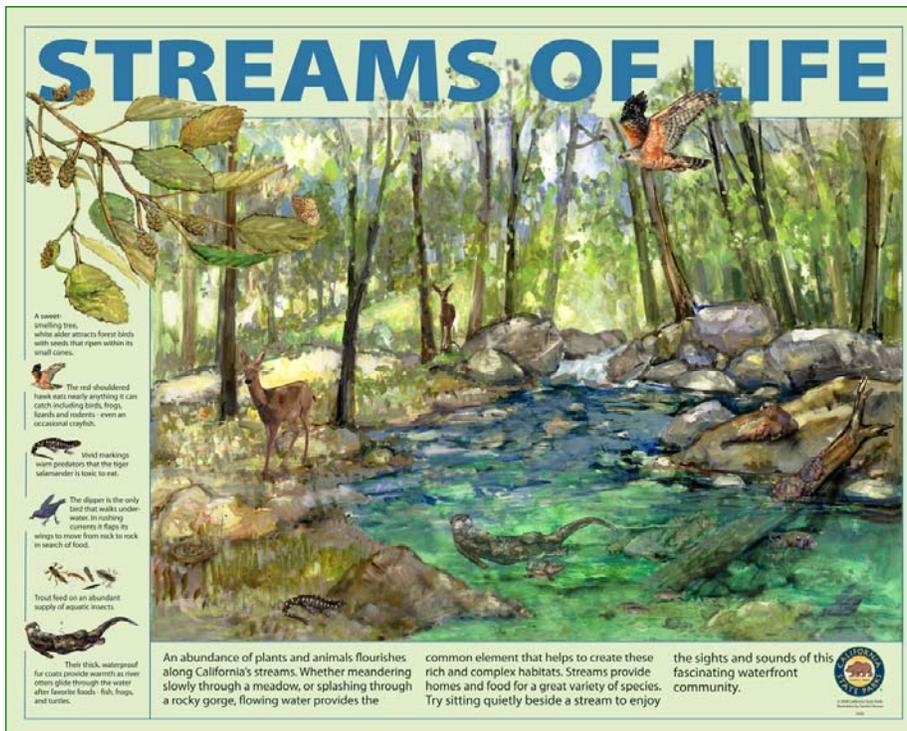
Researchers at California State University Sacramento recently completed the largest-ever economic survey of state parks visitors. They questioned more than 9,700 people at 27 parks over 18 months.

The researchers concluded that park visitors spend an average of \$58 per person each day inside and outside the parks, which adds up to more than \$4 billion a year. Out-of-state visitors spend three times more per day than the average, producing \$1.6 billion in economic activity for the state.

Even if these numbers were an exaggeration that doubled or tripled the actual economic impact, it still makes little sense to risk that benefit by slashing the State Parks budget to save \$14 million a year. ☛

Thanks to the Following Contributors:

Blythe Liles; Heather McCummins; Diane McGrath; John Mott; Donna Pozzi; Carolyn Schimandle; Ty Smith; John Werminski. ☛



A third interpretive panel available through the Interpretation & Education Division.

for if you're using state funds, and one if the funding would come from some other source—in which case we simply have the vendor invoice that other source directly).

So check out the Park Panel Program webpage to see what's available, and consider how you might be able to take advantage of this program as a means of providing

the catalog have been or are currently being updated (see list of available panels as well as panels now in development, listed at the bottom of the program webpage). ☛

Jenan Saunders is manager of the Planning and Programs Section and Photographic Archives Section of the Interpretation and Education Division.

Interpretive Training When Money Is Tight

by Michael D. Green, Interpreter III

It sometimes seems that interpretive training feels it most when budget woes loom. After surveying the field for ideas and adding a few of my own, here are some strategies for presenting and attending interpretive training during lean times.

Sharing

If your district plans training, consider dividing the expense with nearby districts by sharing the session or the instructor. When Peace Officer Matt Buonaguidi learned that Mott Training Center invited a special instructor for a two-day interpretive training, he contacted the instructor to arrange an evening session for his docents at the same time, supported by his cooperating association.

Interpreter I Michael Hubbartt suggested sending new employees to docent training sessions already planned "to speed up their learning curve." Hubbartt also proposed the creation of a collective PowerPoint file so presentations can be shared, eliminating the time and money of creating new ones. He also envisions a similar file shared department-wide with established guidelines that conform to standards such as those in the Basic Interpretive Learning System handbook.

Some trainers set up free shared internet sites for posting handouts and other training resources. Many put training materials on CDs, saving printing and copying costs.

Another way to share is to ask Mott Training Center to add training you are giving to the Employee Training Management System (ETMS) catalog. Training Specialists at Mott can set it up so you can manage the roster and ensure that training credit is given to participants. This is also an effective way to advertise your training and draw more participants.

If training involves travel, ETMS posts rosters so participants can see who else is attending and arrange to carpool.

Video Conferencing

Increasingly, this technology plays a role in training delivery. Our department uses videoconference training sparingly, but as more districts come on line, opportunities increase. More than a meeting tool, video conferencing can include almost any illustrative medium in an interactive environment. Instructors can be live or taped from an earlier session. As video conferencing improves and equipment becomes less expensive, we will see more of this distance-shrinking, cost effective technology.

Instructor Expenses

For many, the most expensive part of training is paying instructors. Regional Interpretive Specialist Karen Barrett wrote, "I attend conferences with the idea of bringing resources and trainers back to the district. I introduce myself and suggest that they present a session for a State Parks audience. In one instance, the trainer's district covered expenses because it was considered career development."

Know the Department's subject matter experts in your area. Sometimes they'll offer services for very little. Superintendent I Kim Baker says, "I have been known to entice inspiring instructors to conduct training for staff (paid and volunteer) on site. It's usually fairly cheap to get a room and per diem; and sometimes the instructors will even volunteer!"

Think Creatively

Some training conferences are free to speakers, says Baker, "I've gotten into quite a few conferences free that way." She has also taken several parks-related classes through community colleges, offering to pay the inexpensive registra-



tion fee if her supervisor would cover state time and travel. "You just have to be creative," advises Baker.

Another idea is to visit other parks that have similar resources. "On several occasions," Baker continues, "I have loaded up my staff in a district pool van, and sent them out to other parks. As a morale booster one year, I took a bunch of us to see the State Museum Resource Center. Bruce Stiny showed us a great time. Everyone had fun and got a better perspective of the Department. We were able to include seasonal and perm staff and it was cheap – no actual costs aside from time and gas."

Baker also reminds us that the California State Park Rangers Association offers scholarships for training. Candidates may go to the CSPRA site at <http://www.cspra.com/scholarship.html> to apply.

As the deadline for this article approached, California State Parks braced to close units and implement huge cutbacks that will, no doubt, limit opportunities to attend or deliver training. Hopefully, suggestions contained herein will prove helpful, or at least pertain to brighter days ahead. ☘

Michael Green is the Interpretive Program Coordinator at Monterey State Historic Park. In September, he added to his duties by becoming the sector's Volunteer Coordinator.

Minimal State Parks Training This Year

by Sara M. Skinner, Interpreter II, Training Specialist

The questions keep coming from the email list-serves and employee conversations. What does "being creative" and "doing more with less" really mean? As the training specialist assigned to most of the interpretation, cultural resource, and natural resource training, the outlook is very minimal for these courses.

So, how do we keep the morale of this department from sinking lower and offer training to provide needed certifications with a very limited budget? We're trying to figure that out.



Interpreter II Cara O'Brien teaching the Basic Interpretation Learning System (BILS) for BVST 30, 2007.

The training schedule is still being studied by members of the Park Operations Policy Group (POPG), which is made up of the division chiefs of our department. POPG reviews and decides what and how we can offer training that our employees need.

The Basic Visitor Services Training (BVST) Group 34 scheduled to start at the beginning of October 2009 has been postponed. We are working on using new ways to conduct and provide training by adding more regional training and video/web based training.

However, regional trainings can be expensive when housing/meals are factored in compared with the re-

duced rates we receive at the Asilomar and Marconi Conference Centers.



Ranger and lifeguard cadets interpret natural systems at Point Lobos SRA, BVST 30, 2007.

The ideal would be to have attendees who live in the area commute to the training just as they would for their normal unit assignment. We will be advertising training that is provided by local, county, and regional parks departments, agencies, and nonprofits.



Ranger and lifeguard cadets at the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

Outside training can be added to an employee's training record and entered into ETMS for future reference and/or credit. If you are providing training in your location or are attending outside training that includes interpretation in addition to your normally scheduled docent/volunteer training, we want to keep track of this. Please send me information about your training so that we can monitor training statewide.

A monthly mini-newsletter, for everyone to contribute to, will be sent out via email once a month with training programs being offered regionally. Please look for it soon.

If you know of interpretive training in your area or would like to add training that you are providing to a calendar, please email Sara M. Skinner at sskinner@parks.ca.gov. Please include the following: name of training, dates/times, location, contact name/number/email.



BVST 32 and 33 ranger and lifeguard cadets learn aquatic safety in the field.

(Example Format: Theme Building, May 2nd 2007 0900-1200, Slickrock State Park Visitor Center, Contact: Slimy Snail 831-555-1212 snail@foot.com) ☪

Below: BVST 33 Ranger Cadet Ivan Hernandez helps hoist the flag, instructed by Interpreter I Lisa Bradford at the Custom House, Monterey SHP.



Sara M. Skinner facilitates the resources and interpretation training for California State Parks. Before that, she was a Guide I for seven years at Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park.

All photos by Sara Skinner

Dear Master Interpreter

**Dear Master Interpreter,
How do I skillfully incorporate
budget cuts into my presenta-
tion?**

M.T. Pockets

Dear M.T.,
This makes me think of the expres-
sion, “Misery loves company” with
the corollary “Company doesn’t love
misery.” It seems rude to share our
budget problems with visitors who
have their own financial concerns
but are on vacation, looking for a
good time. Whatever you do, don’t
whine! Weave the fiscal story into
your interpretation. Be factual. Our
visitors should know that the Gen-
eral Fund budget that State Parks
receives accounts for less than 1/10
of one percent of the entire state
budget. For every dollar that funds
the parks, \$2.35 is returned to the
state’s General Fund through eco-
nomic activities in communities
near parks. If facilities have recently
been repaired, point out the im-
provements while also mentioning
the backlog of needed work. Tell
how many volunteers your park
has. We want our visitors to know
we are working hard to keep the
parks open and preserve the re-
sources.

**Dear Master Interpreter,
What’s the best way to handle
a controversial question with a
delicate audience?**

Pru Dent

Dear Pru,
When answering a controversial
question, no matter who the audi-
ence is, you want to present multi-
ple perspectives to the issue in a
diplomatic yet neutral way. Provide
visitors with the pertinent facts so
they can make an informed opinion.
If possible, make the issue relevant
to the audience through either per-
sonal connections, discussion or
experiences. Be prepared to pro-
vide sources for reference material
if visitors want to delve deeper into
the issue.

**Dear Master Interpreter,
In these days of concern over
germs, how do I gracefully
avoid shaking hands with
guests?**

A. Larm

Dear A. Larm:
There are a variety of ways to avoid
shaking hands, depending on
venue, familiarity, etc. Strive to re-
spectfully maintain the relationship.
After shaking hands, you could im-
mediately excuse yourself and pri-
vately apply hand sanitizer; or you
could find another way to do a
greeting—wave, move in close for a
hug, pat on shoulder, etc. Think
about positioning yourself so that
shaking hands is not possible, then
smile and give a small bow. Com-
bining one or more of these tech-
niques could be helpful. More
ideas are available at [http://
answers.yahoo.com/question/
index?
qid=20080929173413AAkErK1](http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080929173413AAkErK1)

**Dear Master Interpreter,
How do you talk to a guest who
is picking fruit or flowers after
you explained to your group this
is off limits?**

Harv Est

Dear Harv,
Explaining **that** something is forbid-
den is much less effective than ex-
plaining **why**. Part of the “why” an-
swer is recreational—picking flow-
ers prevents other park visitors from
enjoying them. Part of the answer is
ecological—a picked flower or fruit
leaves no seeds, diminishing next
year’s flower display and depriving
the other life forms that may de-
pend on that type of plant. Part of
the answer is philosophical—one
reason that parks exist is to allow
nature to operate without much hu-
man interference.

If all else fails, part of the answer is
legal: It’s a misdemeanor violation
of the California Code of Regula-
tions to pick them!



**Dear Master Interpreter,
How do I handle guests who in-
sist I am wrong because the
last time they visited the park,
that’s what they were told?**

Amelia Rate

Dear Amelia,
The fact that you are asking shows
that you realize this must be done
diplomatically. (Of course, being a
good interpreter, you keep up with
the latest well-researched sources
about your park, and are comfort-
able saying “I don’t know” when
necessary, so you have confidence
in the information you provide.)

Keep your answer positive. Without
denigrating either the visitor or the
person who gave them misinforma-
tion on their previous visit, explain
that ongoing historical or natural
science research often gives us
new information that we can then
share with the public, and that
sometimes there are different schol-
arly interpretations of the same
data. If they still insist you are
wrong, you can pleasantly ask if
they’d like you to send them a refer-
ence citation since they are so in-
terested in the topic, get their ad-
dress, and follow up later. Beyond
this, it’s best to just leave it be and
move on.

**Dear Master Interpreter,
How do I handle children who are bothersome to other guests when their parents don't acknowledge their behavior?**

R.E. Primand

Dear R.E.,
Unruly children can be a challenge when parents aren't paying attention. If it's an outdoor setting, suggest to a parent that their little ones may be happier running around away from the group. If it's a museum setting, often a well-placed word from an adult other than the parent (like you) will stop the behavior. Hopefully the parents will get a clue. If not, don't hesitate to kindly ask ineffective parents to keep better watch on their youngsters.

**Dear Master Interpreter,
What is an oral history and how can it be effectively used in my presentation?**

D. Piction

Dear D. Piction,
An oral history is recorded personal narrative of historical significance using an audio or video format. Oral historians formally record and transcribe interviews of people who are related to a topic of study. Oral histories can connect your visitors to your site by using the voices of the past to tell the story of the individuals, communities, and events associated with your park.

Some effective uses of oral histories include extracting quotes to emphasize emotions and historical details, creating films or exhibits, or developing living history programs. The possible uses of oral histories are endless, and these personal testimonies are valuable for documenting the memories and perceptions of life in the past.

Please Remember: Oral histories are one of many sources used to research the past. Always use additional sources of historical evidence to confirm the accuracy of your presentation. Also, ensure you have acquired written permission to use an oral history in a public format. ☞

When Loyalty is Low

In these chaotic times, it's often difficult to manage employee loyalty. Jill Geisler, with the Poynter Institute, works with media managers to help them become more effective leaders. Some of her suggestions translate to the tough job of managing employees faced with enormous budget cuts in California State Parks.

It used to be, says Geisler, if you invested time, training and trust in an employee, you expected commitment in return. That's how loyalty was often defined when times were good. Maybe you issued secret comp days to hard workers or tweaked work shifts for good employees with special needs or took a chance by re-assigning underperformers to new roles in which they might thrive.

That was then. According to Geisler, manager mindsets must change. Unfortunately today's economic meltdown is why. Now it's all about the numbers. Since you probably can't make long-term promises, you make a different deal. You're no longer the good boss of the people who will follow you indefinitely. Instead, you are the good agent of your employee's success, wherever it takes them.

Here are a dozen ways to do that:

1. Honestly assess an employee's skill sets for the evolving demands of State Parks;
2. Help employees build skills that make them valuable to you and make them marketable elsewhere;
3. Recognize and address when too much work is dumped on too few people;
4. Set priorities so stressed-out employees can know what to *stop* doing, do less of, or do last;
5. Don't be so focused on today's tasks or fearful of the future that you're paralyzed to help your employees;
6. Be a student of new and emerging technologies and opportunities so your people can reap rewards;
7. Let people vent—within reason—about real pain, anger and grief, without seeing it as an assault on you;
8. Give employees the earliest possible warning of bad news... and good news, too;
9. Understand and accept that workers may have one eye on the door;
10. Don't take it personally if an employee leaves, though you'd prefer they stay;
11. Regard each employee departure as a reason to communicate with the rest of your team about their hopes, dreams and fears;
12. Find something to legitimately praise, celebrate, or laugh about whenever possible.

Geisler says managers also need to amp up these skills:

1. Communication: Information is currency in changing times and people need face time with you.
2. Planning: Your failure to be organized can send stressed-out employees over the edge.
3. Flexibility: An overly rigid adherence to structure can kill your team's creativity.
4. Learning: You must push past your discomfort with the tech or economic side of parks, build expertise and become a better advocate for the team.

Finally, Geisler says managers need empathy, the ability to see the world through the eyes of their employees and to understand why their employees might be more selective with their trust these days. ☞

Easy Opportunities for Free Money

by Constance Gordon, Interpreter I

If you don't yet have a donation box in your park's visitor center, you are missing the chance to gather free money. Before you order one or build one yourself, there are a few things you should know.

Donation boxes should be prominent and inviting with bright colors and a clear message. They should be in view of a worker and secured both from unauthorized opening and unauthorized removal, according to Colin Macgregor Stevens, curator of the Burnaby Village Museum.

They should always be neat and tidy and most museum managers believe you should "seed the box." If visitors see money already there, they are more likely to donate, which means using something like Plexiglas so the donations are visible. Gayle Cornish of the Osoyoos Museum says big donation boxes work better than small ones and a \$20 bill gets more 20s.

"Most people expect to pay something today," says Cuyler Page of Heritage Interpretation Services, "so don't be shy about it. Post a sign about how much it really costs to run the place." He suggests making the donation box "especially accessible on the way out...If you blow their socks off, they will be happy to add money as they leave."

"We've had great success placing a motion activated noise-maker on

the donation box," says Bee Jackson, curator of the Sunshine Coast Museum and Archives. She admits the box is "in your face," but says the noise makes it a little awkward to slip past without acknowledging it. Currently she has a croaking frog and says children love it (bringing their parents with them)!

Jason Elton, with Charity Golf Days, believes in what he calls "gift aid." He places envelopes next to the box for donations and claims it increases revenue by 25%.

tors center posted this sign: Do you think wolves should be reintroduced into the environment? Visitors could vote by putting money in the box that said yes or the one that said no.

One of our most successful boxes," says Bruce Davies, curator of Craigdarroch Castle Historical Museum Society, "allowed people to choose from four different projects." He recommends a design that makes using it fun. But if you decide to do something like a large funnel for coins that spirals down in

to the box, kids will love it but you will have to scoop up the treasure to transport it to a coin counting machine.

There are other ways to collect free money. You could program your gift shop cash registers to accept donations. Cashiers might ask shoppers with uneven totals if they would like to have their purchases rounded up to an even dollar amount with

the change donated to your park. Every little bit helps.

Finally, there are ATM donation boxes that accept credit or debit cards. Install one with an irresistible message. Visitors using the bank ATM might be inspired, with their bank cards already in their hands, to donate money through your park's ATM at the same time. ☞



Before...

Sometimes you end up doing it yourself, like Michael Green, interpretive program coordinator at Monterey State Historic Park. He took an old, tired donation box and transformed it. (Photos above.) He says the "tiles" on the new box were made out of old PVC plastic pipe that he ripped down the middle with a jigsaw, cut into 1½ inch pieces, and hot glued to the box lid. Everything he used was "found" material except the paint, which his cooperating association paid for. (The tile paint is actually made for restoring terra cotta planters.) He found the state park logo stickers in an old file in his office and made the signs above the door with the office label maker.

...and After

If you work at somewhere like Hearst Castle, you could ask visitors to donate a dollar for every Hearst magazine to which they subscribe. Or at Jack London State Historic Park, visitors could donate a dollar for every Jack London book they've read.

Or you can use two donation boxes. Each box would represent one side of an issue. For example, one visi-

Don't Drive By

or One Way to Cope with Entrance Fee Hikes

by Ranger Rich Levin, Limekiln State Park

Visitors making their annual pilgrimage this winter on scenic Highway 1 through Big Sur to their beloved Limekiln State Park will be able to experience a powerful new interpretive tool. Inside and next to the entrance kiosk, there will be a new photography exhibit designed to promote the park's resources.

The exhibit was designed by conservationist Kenna Foster. It is her personal photographic vision of the natural environment in the park.

The theme of the exhibit is "Get Out Of Your Car." It will challenge road warriors to pause briefly and observe the cultural significance and natural wonders of our park through Foster's inspired lense.

Limekiln State Park is 56 miles south of Carmel next to the Ventana Wilderness Area, where the Santa Lucia Mountains meet the Pacific. It was nearly burned to the ground in the Chalk Fire in October 2008 and is currently closed to the public, but the park is already regenerating.

The gallery of park photographs is available to all visitors who stop. They will be given a free ten-minute parking pass to view it.

We hope it will inspire them to pay the full parking fee when the park re-opens. They can then take a brief stroll through the surrealistic world of our redwood grove, or try a

two-minute leg stretch by walking to the beach to experience the ocean's mystic powers, or perhaps visitors will take fifteen minutes for



Beach and waterfall photos courtesy of Kenna Foster. Above is the kiosk that will be transformed into a gallery of Foster's photos.

a stream-side saunter back into time on a trail that leads to history's doorstep at the lime kilns.

Beginning in 1887, the Rockland Lime and Lumber Company extracted, processed and exported thousands of barrels of lime from Limekiln Canyon. Four stone and iron furnaces were built at the base of a slope eroding from a limestone deposit.

Limestone rocks were loaded into the kilns, where very hot wood fires burned for long periods to purify the

lime. It was shipped to northern ports for use in concrete. After only three years, the limestone deposit was all but depleted, as was the

redwood forest that had been nearly clear-cut to use for lumber and fuel. Today the four kilns, some stone walls, and bridge abutments are the only remains of the briefly thriving lime industry.

We hope experiencing the park will fill viewers with a positive energy and an unforgettable emotional experience.

Whatever experience visitors find, it will certainly help any road weariness or familial pressures building inside the minivan. The stress is sure to freely blow off just like the whale spout visitors might see in our wild ocean cove.

The park will offer a money back guarantee to anyone who, tempted by the artist's interpretive display, pays for day-use parking and after "getting out of the car," for some reason, is disappointed with the experience. We are confident that once visitors explore the park for themselves, they will consider the parking fee a bargain, even with recent fee hikes.

We hope the exhibit will entice visitors to use the park for more than just a restroom stop; similar exhibits may be a good way to entice visitors to enjoy and connect with your park's resources, too. ☪

California's Tapestry

A Diversity Feature Article

Fall 2009



Reaching Across the Distance by Heather McCummins, PORTS Program Coordinator, Northern CA

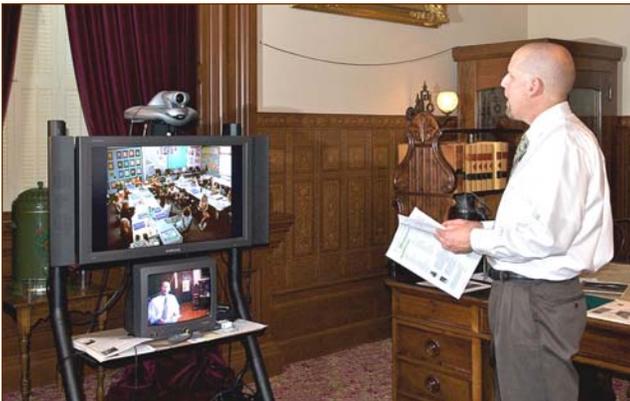
Each year thousands of school children descend on our state parks to participate in school group interpretive programs. Yet, if you look closely at the demographics, you will realize there is a large student population unable to experience parks due to geographic, economic, or cultural barriers. California State Parks is continually faced with the age-old question, "How can we serve this audience?"

Out of the Department's quest to answer this question, Parks Online Resources for Teachers and Students (PORTS) was born. Five years ago, PORTS began as a pilot program with the dual intention of determining: 1) Whether videoconferencing could be used to provide quality interpretive programs to all California students regardless of geographic, economic, or cultural differences, and; 2) Whether the Department could establish itself in the public education community as a premier provider of interpretive content through the use of videoconferencing. PORTS is now a successful partnership between public education and California State Parks, reaching the diverse student population we seek to serve.

Purposely targeting the underserved student population, PORTS brings the awe inspiring resources within state parks directly to these students in their classrooms. Children in the heart of Los Angeles experience the sights and sounds of elephant seals arriving on a far away beach. A student in the small, Central Valley town of Ripon speaks with a park interpreter about the creatures next to her in a tide pool. San Francisco students re-live the excitement of gold rush days while viewing a living mining town. A classroom in the remote town of Etna in Siskiyou County explores the geologic wonders of the Borrego Badlands. For many students in these very urban or rural areas, PORTS is their first exposure to the wonders of state parks, and for some, their first exposure to the natural environment. PORTS is not a replacement for field trips or for the need for these students to actually experience park resources firsthand, but it can be the initial connection.

Approximately 85,000 K-12 students in 31 counties have participated in PORTS programs. Sixty-four percent of these students attend lower income schools that receive federal Title I funding. Many of the schools predominately serve the Hispanic, African American and Asian communities. By partnering with the educational community, California State Parks is slowly achieving its goal of reaching this diverse student population. As one teacher wrote, "Our experiences with State Parks have been a valuable resource."

Through your school group interpretive programs and PORTS, let's continue to look for innovative ways and opportunities to connect to California's diverse student population. ☪



Top – LuAnn Thompson webcasting from the Borrego Badlands; Middle – Berndt Stolfi, webcasting from the State Capitol; Bottom – Ty Smith and Constance Gordon on the monitor in the newly constructed webcast studio behind the Roman Pool at Hearst Castle.



Clarifications from Sara M. Skinner, Guest Editor of the Spring/Summer 2009 edition of *The Catalyst* on Interpretive Training:

Page 2—Ranger Eric Christensen was a member of BVST 30, not BVST 31.



Page 11—“Interpreting Your Way into the Hearts of Management.” The picture accompanying this article (at left) was of State Parks managers and archaeologists attending Resource Management Cultural Intermediate in February of 2009. They were being trained to assess a site after damage. The picture was chosen because it represented the managers in a great light (learning), which complemented the article and summary of what the author wrote. After doing a lot of the damage assessment reporting in an area, the archaeologists can then assist with training field staff on the resources and the importance of protecting/preserving these areas (therefore, relating interpretation/history/etc. to the park visitors). If the use of the photo caused confusion, apologies are extended. ☙

Empty Desk Syndrome ~ What to Do?

Empty desks can be a challenge or an opportunity according to Jill Geisler with the Poynter Institute. If you are downsizing the number of employees at your park, the empty desk of someone who has quit or retired and not been replaced can send an unintended message. That empty desk is an icon of grief, loss or despair, says Geisler, an emblem of a “better past and a frightening future.” Effective managers, suggests Geisler, would ask the staff to help reorient the desks to help with work flow or to better address your park’s mission. ☙

Why Pay for Something Priceless?

by Nick Franco,
District Superintendent,
San Luis Obispo Coast



Montaña de Oro State Park is a beautiful, nearly 10,000 acre park in the San Luis Obispo Coast District with miles of coastline and miles of trails. There are campgrounds and equestrian camps, tide pools and dune systems, endangered plant and animal habitats, Native American and ranch resources, surf spots and places to launch a hang glider, and an outdoor environmental school campus. In short, it's a priceless part of California's coast, and interpreting these wonderful resources is a joy for most staff and volunteers.



Montaña de Oro surfer heads in to the water with Morro Rock in background.

The entrance road into the park and through most of the park is owned by the county. We do not have an entrance station, kiosk, or day use fee for the park. That is about to change.

The General Plan for the park states that without an entrance station in place, "visitor and vehicle

control and revenue collection would be inefficient." Through an operating agreement with the County of San Luis Obispo, we hope to begin charging a day use fee in January 2010.



Surfers wait for the perfect wave while the sun sets behind them.

We are also defining different locations for a portable and/or permanent kiosk on Pecho Valley Road in Montaña de Oro. We are currently doing the research on how best to do this with traffic flow and for the lowest up-front cost possible.

The main response to starting a day use fee program where there hasn't been one in the past is, "Why should we have to pay?" Well, the reality is that we have always paid for parks, including Montaña de Oro; it's just a question of who pays and how. Through taxes exclusively? Through user fees? Maybe through some benefactor?

It's certainly my belief that there is a general public good that comes from having parks and therefore it's appropriate to use general tax revenues to fund them. It's also my belief that users benefit significantly more than non-users and should have to pay more than the general taxpayer in order to enjoy those benefits.

The question is: what is the appropriate proportion between the two? Especially in these current economically challenged times, that balance point between users funding parks and General Fund support for parks shifts more toward the user.

That's where we currently are at Montaña de Oro State Park. User fees will have to be implemented if we want to continue to enjoy the many and varied resources and recreational opportunities of this park. Interpreting that need is critical to the long term success of the park and, the protection of its resources.

We are currently going through the process of educating the public about what it actually costs to run a park, where fees go to support the parks, and how fees help everyone enjoy the resources. Having annual passes, volunteer passes, and other offers helps those who are frequent visitors, but understanding that parks aren't free is a greater benefit in the long run. Interpreting the need and purpose of fees probably isn't the most exciting topic, but it is one that we're finding has great benefits in keeping parks available to the public. If people know that their fees are providing a benefit to them and to the people of California and know what those benefits are, they are more likely to continue to support parks.

Once again, it goes back to Tilden, doesn't it? "Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection." ☙

Photos by Constance Gordon

California State Parks: Worth Every Penny

by Ty Smith, Interpreter II

When I heard that this issue of *The Catalyst* was to focus on interpreting on a tight budget, my first thought was, "Is there any other kind?" Clearly, though, such a concept is relative, and there can be little doubt that the current budget crisis, with its attendant threats to State Parks, is the worst in memory.

Newspapers have spilled much ink chronicling the nauseating and nail-biting drama, but perhaps more interesting than the doom and gloom news stories are the comments readers post in the on-line discussion forums that many of the news media outlets provide. I have followed these discussion threads with particular interest.

From these posts one simple pattern emerges: Irrespective of political stripe, the overarching opinion of these citizens is that parks should pay for themselves, either through cutting back services, raising fees, corporate sponsorship, or privatization. The parameters of the current debate seem to preclude the possibility of a parks system that does not "pay for itself."

It was to the cacophony of voices calling for economically viable parks that our advocates proudly answered that parks do pay for themselves. CSUS released a timely study quantifying such an assertion stating that for every dollar spent on state parks, \$2.35 was gained to the state's General Fund. This argument seemed to gain traction across the political spectrum.

The problem with providing "proof" that parks contribute more to the economy than they actually cost to run is that, in doing so, parks advocates, if only unwittingly, uphold the idea that parks should pay for themselves. Through arguments of the economic contributions of parks to the state, park supporters did a

good job of defining the value of parks, but not a very good job of defining park values.

We keep hearing the tag lines about parks attracting tourist dollars, and that closing parks is "penny wise and pound foolish." What we do not hear nearly enough about, however, are our core values.

What of parks providing an escape from urban life, or that parks provide important places for children to exercise, or that many parks protect cultural resources that help us define who we are today through the examples of the past, or that raising fees will ensure visitation by an increasingly narrow segment of Californians? Such arguments should lead and not follow assertions of economic viability.

If the only value of parks is that they bring in tourist dollars to the local economy, then why not run them with volunteers, or turn them over to concessionaires? I keep waiting for someone to articulate the value of parks as an institution; to make the argument that parks, at one-tenth of one percent of the budget, are actually a bargain.

Some might say the economic times that we face are just too tough, or that the political threats are too intense to argue for the intangible benefits of parks. History reveals otherwise.

Good interpretation does not happen in spite of lack of adequate funding, but in many ways because of it. Interpretation as we understand it today was born out of a time more difficult than our own, the 1930s and 1940s. These two decades of economic depression and war brought unparalleled threats to parks. As Janet A. McDonnell details in her study, *World War II: Defending Park Values and Re-*

sources, the genius of Newton Drury, then director of NPS, and his contemporaries, was that they were able to protect parks by articulating an argument about the value of parks that had little to do with their ability to be economically self-sustaining, or their contributions to the economy or war effort.

Experiencing record low visitation, drastic budget cuts, and more drastic employee reductions, such leaders employed rhetoric and reason, to save some of our national and state treasures from mining, logging and weapons testing.

Interpretation is an innovative art and those who interpret well, as the other articles in this edition detail, find good solutions to difficult problems, do more with less and still bring enjoyment and understanding to visitors. But along with connecting visitors to our wondrous park resources, we would do well to step outside of our parks and bring our message to a broader audience.

The biggest challenge we now face is to articulate to the public (visitors and non-visitors alike) what exactly we do. Any argument that ignores these fundamentals can only win a hollow victory. So out with this fool's errand of attempting to prove that parks are self-sustaining and in with what should be our new mantra: California State Parks; worth every penny!

Convincing California's tax payers that parks are worth every penny (and more) may be the only way to maintain a parks system that seeks to serve all of the people of California and not just those who can afford to pay our ever increasing fees. ☪

Ty Smith is the PORTS Program Coordinator for Central California and a Ph.D student in the Public Historical Studies program at UC Santa Barbara.

The Catalyst

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Empty pockets never held anyone back.

Only empty heads and empty hearts can do that. ~ Norman Vincent Peale



Interpretation and Education Division
PO Box 942896
Sacramento CA 94296-0001