

การสื่อความหมาย : เครื่องมือสำหรับการจัดการอุทยานแห่งชาติ
ในประเทศไทย

INTERPRETATION : A MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR NATIONAL
PARKS IN THAILAND

SURACHET CHETTAMART 1/

บทคัดย่อ

กฎเกณฑ์และระเบียบการใช้พื้นที่อุทยานแห่งชาติที่ใช้กันอยู่ในปัจจุบัน นับว่าไม่เหมาะสมกับเป้าหมายที่ต้องการให้ได้มาซึ่ง เป้าหมายล้ำค่าก่อประการ แต่ข้อดีที่ยังคงมีอยู่คือ การปกป้องรักษาทรัพยากรธรรมชาติและสิ่งแวดล้อมที่มีไว้เป็นส่วนถาวรสืบต่อ การดำเนินการด้านพัฒนา ที่ยังคงใช้สื่อสารเช่น "การสื่อความหมาย" หรือการให้ความรู้และความเข้าใจ ตลอดจนความเพลิดเพลินแก่นักท่องเที่ยวสิ่งที่เป็นเครื่องมือที่มีอยู่ในปัจจุบันนี้ในการแก้ปัญหาด้านต่างๆ ที่เกิดขึ้นภายในอุทยานแห่งชาติ หลักการและวิธีการประยุกต์ใช้ ได้พิพากยามเน้นที่สิ่ง ความหมาย รัตตุประลักษณ์ และไม่เคลียร์ให้ทั่วทั้งอุทยาน พร้อมกันนี้ได้มีการรวบรวมและยกตัวอย่างที่ดี ที่สุดที่มีอยู่ในประเทศไทยและได้รับผลลัพธ์ดีอย่างที่ตั้งใจไว้ในต่างประเทศ อย่างไรก็ต้อง การประยุกต์ใช้ การสื่อความหมายเข้ากับการบริหารงานอุทยานในปัจจุบัน อาจมีปัญหาด้วยข้องั้นในระยะแรก เช่น ที่บวบกับงบประมาณและการยอมรับของฝ่ายบริหาร แต่การสื่อความหมายจะดึงดูดคนให้สนใจสู่ค่าธรรมะ คุณค่า ความลับ และเป็นเครื่องมือสำคัญในการจัดการอุทยานแห่งชาติในประเทศไทย

ABSTRACT

Rules and regulations are no longer adequate as sole measures for the use of national park lands to achieve the two conflicting management goals, preservation and recreation. A fresh approach, an interpretation, is proposed for solving management problems. Detailed concept of the interpretation and its possible application are discussed in accordance with several aspects of park management. Successful examples originated in some countries are carefully reviewed. Despite the facts that to integrate the interpretation into actual park operation and administration is a very difficult task, the optimistic approach of interpretation and its values could lend itself to win an important place in any park program.

Key words : Interpretation, Interpreter, Management Tool, Visitors, Park Resources, Interpretive Program

1/ Lecturer of Outdoor Recreation and Park, Department of Conservation, Faculty of Forestry, Kasetsart University

INTRODUCTION

Management of national parks and other equivalent reserves in Thailand is under the jurisdiction of the Royal Forest Department. Its management goal, according to the National Park Act of 1961, is "to conserve the scenery and the natural condition and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the people..... and leave them unimpaired for the use of future generations."

There are two basic ideas in this act : providing education and enjoyment of the present generations and maintaining the unimpaired conditions of park lands for the benefit of the future generations. There is a question as to whether these two differing elements can live together very long in the same environment without one threatening the existence of the other.

This management problem is believed cannot best be solved only by arbitrary decision or by legislation, but by the more gradual process of educating the visitors. Interpretation is suggested as a tool for sound management in order to achieve this difficult goal.

The purpose of this paper is to review the concepts of interpretation and to discuss its possibilities as a tool for management of national parks and equivalent reserves in Thailand.

CONCEPTS OF INTERPRETATION

Webster International Dictionary (1976) defines interpretation as "explanation of what is not immediately explicit" or "explanation of actions or events by pointing out inner relationships" or "activity directed toward the enlightenment of the public concerning the significance of the work of a public service or agency." Thus interpretation can be defined in several ways depending upon one's profession or one's area of expertise. In the fields of outdoor recreation and/or outdoor education itself, this variation does exist but the agreement can be found in many aspects. As Wagar (1974, p. 101) sum it up when he describes interpretation as "the translation of information into understandable terms. In setting used by recreationists, interpretation refers to all the procedures used to make natural and cultural history understandable and enjoyable."

From the definition cited above, broad objective of interpretation can be developed. It seeks to accomplish three objectives (Sharpe, 1976). The first objective is to assist the visitor in developing a keener awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the area he or she is visiting. The second objective is to accomplish management goals. The third objective is to promote public understanding of an agency and its programs.

A lack of understanding on the part of visitors contributes to the increasing disturbance of park resources. To help the visitors

to understand and appreciate those resources can be done through interpretation. This overall effort is known as the interpretive program which requires the personnel, facilities, and activities of an organization or agency. It is believed that the interpretive program can and should play a major role in building a bridge between the world of the park and the world of the visitor (Sharpe, 1976; Eddy, 1968, Vaux, 1960; Wagar, 1974).

More and more park and recreation administrators and managers are beginning to see how vital interpretive programs are if they hope to keep their parks. The interpretive programs conducted by the Federal and State park administrations are important examples of the resource management technique (Vaux, 1960). The interpretive program is used to relate the natural or cultural phenomena of a park to the visitors and utilizes a wide variety of methods and facilities to convey the subject matter. These involve museum exhibits, guided excursions, outdoor exhibits, publications, signs and labels, and other similar tools.

Several factors contribute to the development of successful interpretive programs. Interpretive planning is one of them. It is considered as an integral part by the facts that a comprehensive interpretive plan is a prerequisite to funding the interpretive program (Sharpe, 1976). We must realize, however, that the interpretive plan is only a part of an overall park planning process. Thus it should be developed under the agency's goals and objectives and coordinated with its overall planning process (Perry, 1968; Putney and Wagar, 1973; Young, 1970).

An individual who performs the interpretive functions is called "interpreter", regardless of the organization he (or she) belongs to, and regardless of the setting or site or of the subject matter he is interpreting. He may be a park interpreter as defined according to the setting or site, or he may be an interpretive naturalist or interpretive specialist as defined according to the subject matter (Cherem, 1977).

For the purpose of this paper, it would be appropriate to call him as a park interpreter, because this task would be performed largely in the park boundaries. The park interpreter is responsible for all activities related to interpretation and is mainly concerned with the development and coordination of the overall interpretive program.

No matter what the park interpreter will do to serve the overall park objectives, he must possess some special characters. The park interpreter must have two basic competencies : he must have a strong foundation in both the natural and the social sciences to provide a basic for the development of a holistic environmental awareness, and the ability to communicate in an effective manner to visitors of all age groups. In short, the park interpreter must have the knowledge, understanding, techniques and skills necessary to develop, lead and evaluate programs of park interpretation in order to meet the needs of a variety of audiences through innovative uses of available media (Elliott, 1978). These competencies may be acquired in a variety of ways with self study and experience and course work in colleges.

The visitors are the interpreter's reason for being. It is true that the visitors to parks and other types of recreation areas vary greatly in age, education, culture, and experiences. This diversity, in turn, is responsible for the visitor's values, preferences, attitudes, and perception toward parks and park resources. Thus the interpreter must try to understand the visitors (Field and Wagar, 1976) in order that the maximum benefit of the interpretive program could be created and maintained for the audiences.

INTERPRETATION AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL

Now we are back to the second objective of interpretation----to accomplish management goals. This broad objective implies that interpretation can be used as a management tool for parks and other recreation areas or sites. Fischer (1966) supports this generalization when he expresses that interpretation would facilitate an important flow of understanding between the administration and the park visitor that not only enhances the visitor's park experience and awareness (the first objective of interpretation) but also aids in the management of the park. He points out that many visitors who come to a park with little awareness of the park's function and of the resources within it may damage these resources. Moreover, the increasing visitation to parks brings more vandalism, theft, fire, safety, and poaching problems. But all these problems are susceptible to interpretive solutions (Sharpe and Odegaard, forthcoming). Thus interpretive program should be a valuable asset for park managers in

solving these problems. Dunmire (1976) expresses this very well as he suggested "interpretation should be employed by park management as a primary means of achieving all management objectives affecting the public. Interpreters should think of themselves as an integral part of the management team and should actively participate in developing and reviewing park-wide objectives and programs".

The followings are some selected examples regarding interpretive solutions as applied in the different management problem areas.

Natural Resources

Interpretation can increase the effectiveness of park resource management. Wager (1974, p. 101) indicates that informed visitors are likely to use park resources with less damage than uninformed visitors. And moreover interpretation can be used to attract people to the areas suited for use and away from the areas that are overused or unsuited for heavy use. This could be confirmed by the observation at Mt. Rainier's meadow lands. The problem here was some of the meadows were heavily damaged as the result of the hikers criss-crossing with social trails and short-cuts. Management wanted to save these attractive sites, therefore Trail Closed signs were placed at both ends of the damaging trails for directing the visitor traffics and jute matting was laid over those trails for soil protection and regeneration purposes. But these efforts failed by the fact that the visitors continued to walk on the trails. Management discovered that the visitors misunderstood and

confused with the signs and matting. Later with the help of interpretation the signs were replaced by "Closed for Meadow Rehabilitation" signs and brochures explaining the visitors about the meadow delicacy were handed out. At the same time a self-guiding trail was constructed to simultaneously draw impact away from the meadows. As a result, use of the trails has been reduced by 95 percent.

~~the impact of the visitors on meadow could be reduced and maintained by giving information to the visitors about the significance of the Historical Site~~

Living history or historic demonstration is one of the important techniques used to explain the story of historical sites. Many resource management agencies, especially National Park Service, believe it will help to stimulate public interest and support for historical site preservation. For example, Gibbs (1977) made some observations first at Fort Washington. He explained that the Fort had been neglected and abandoned until recent years, a ranger started firing a cannon with a volunteer crew who visited the Fort. As a result of this demonstration including a torchlight tour around the Fort, funds for restoration began to arrive and the Fort was being restored and stabilized. The Fort has since been opened to the public.

Visitor Protection and Law Enforcement

Protection of the park visitors from injuries by any means is another aspect of park management. Interpretation has been proved to be a useful in this area. It also assists law enforcement to guard

against vandalism, theft, and other wrongdoings on the part of visitors in a park area.

At Griffith Park in Los Angeles, according to Weeks (1971), the rangers were trained in a wide range of subjects but focusing on interpretive nature study, handling emergencies, and public relations. They could be anything when needed. For example, they could provide first aid; they could be firefighters; they could act as law-enforcers when tense situations developed and they could be educators by conducting nature walks. In addition, they were trained to persuade disruptive individuals or groups to cooperate in protecting the rights of all users of the park and offer guidance and help whenever sought.

Concerning law enforcement, Sharpe and Gensler (1977) cited an example of campground problem at Eldorado National Forest in California. Over-enthusiastic visitors here use of motorbikes led to a great disturbance and annoyance of other campers in the area. The interpretive brochure with a motorbike picture on the cover were distributed to all the cyclists, and even placed on all parked motorbikes. In it the use regulations were stated in brief and understandable fashion. At the same time, campground programs began to include a message on campground behavior and proper use of motorbikes. As a result; the change in the use of this campground was dramatic. This success confirms the findings of a study by Ross and Moeller (1974). They found that campers are not well informed about rules. For improving knowledge of rules the systematic distribution of rule brochures is suggested.

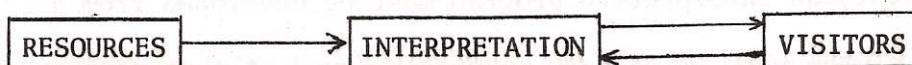
Maintenance

Maintenance is also an integral function in park management because a properly maintained park offers a more enjoyable experience, contributes to good public relations, and reduces operational costs (Sharpe and Odegaard). Vandalism and visitor impacts are found to be major causes for maintenance problems. The Los Angeles's Park and Recreation Department estimated a probable loss of \$ 160,000 annually from destruction of park properties. But the actual figure was found to be \$ 225,000 at year end (Bethel, 1871). This suggests that repair and replacement costs must be met by funds which have been diverted from visitor services or from expansion of park facilities. The visitor also suffers when irreplaceable objects of unusual resources and some attractive facilities are damaged or destroyed, thus the attractiveness of the park will be diminished.

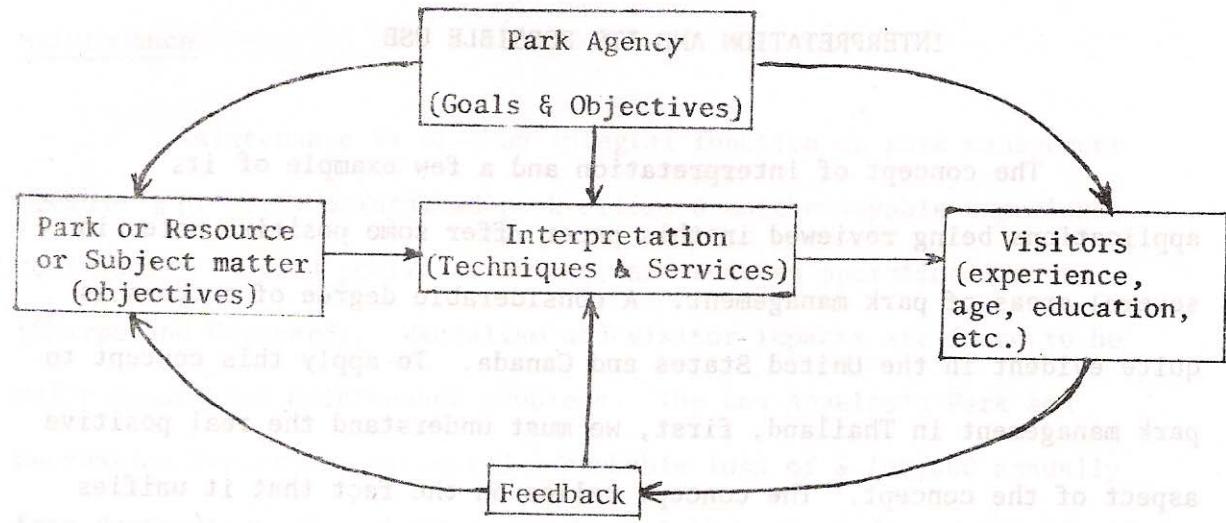
There are several approaches for solving destructive vandalism and visitor impacts. Interpretation is one of them. This includes on-site and off-site interpretive efforts. According to Harrison (1976), puppet shows on littering and vandalism for younger children, followed by discussions and group participation have been used at East Bay Park in Oakland. Michigan State Parks have supervised workshops and nature activities for children by teaching them how to use the park resources with minimum impact. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources also makes a point of discussing park problems during evening programs. By showing visitors the consequences of depreciative behavior, patrons are encouraged to be more careful.

INTERPRETATION AND ITS POSSIBLE USE

The concept of interpretation and a few example of its applications being reviewed in this paper offer some positive notes in several areas of park management. A considerable degree of success is quite evident in the United States and Canada. To apply this concept to park management in Thailand, first, we must understand the real positive aspect of the concept. The concept relies on the fact that it unifies the resource base of a park and the people or the visitors within a working framework. A flow diagram can be used to illustrate this point.



The resource component is a prime factor in attracting the visitor to the park. By its nature, the resource determines the amount of access to it. This access to the resource is believed to be a deciding element for an interpretive program development (Fischer, 1966). The flow from the resource to the interpretation determines the kind of media or technique to be used in the interpretive program. At the same time the flow from the visitor component to the interpretation is equally important since the visitor and visit characteristics determine the kind and level of the media used. The flow from the interpretation to the visitor means to accomplish the purpose of the program and meet the visitor's objectives. From this basic diagram, a working model can be constructed as a following :



Let us consider the overall model and the relationship of the components. First, an interpretive program must be developed from a firm knowledge of the park or of park resources found at that park. From this knowledge we are flexible to choose park resources or subject matters for our interpretation (Cherem, 1977). The subject matters may involve natural characteristics of park or of specific park resources or may involve some aspects of park management such as wildlife protection, visitor safety, or park regulation, etc.

The next step is to establish overall objectives for our interpretive program. Many believe this is a crucial step in a program development. As Putney and Wagar (1973) point out, "One of the major difficulties in evaluating the effectiveness of interpretation has been the frequent absence of clearly articulated objectives." Thus we have to specify what we are trying to accomplish from our interpretive effort. This set of objectives must be specific and measurable, and, of course, it must be consistent with the overall park's purposes or the agency's goals.

and objectives as cited earlier.

Once the objective for subject matters to be interpreted are established we can select the most appropriate technique and service (or media) that will suit best to both the resource or subject matter and the visitors. Because the visitors to parks are diverse, we must have the skill and a bit of art to employ such particular technique and service to meet the taste and objective of a particular visitor or groups of visitors.

The next and final step in our model is to design a feedback mechanism and integrate it into the interpretive program. This mechanism may be called "Interpretive evaluation." Field and Wagar (1973) describe this term as "a flow of information from the visitors that lets the interpreter know how well he is achieving both program's objectives and the visitors' objectives." This, again, suggests that different visitors or groups of visitors have different objectives coming to park due to their different backgrounds. This flow of feedback from the visitors can be used to correct our presentation format in order to increase program's effectiveness. And the reason for having a clear and specific set of objectives for interpretive program should, therefore, serve this purpose very well.

Let's consider the goals of national parks and equivalent reserves in Thailand as cited at the outset of this paper; first, to provide education and enjoyment of the present generation, and second, to maintain the unimpaired conditions of park lands for the benefit of the future generations. As far as the concept of interpretation is concerned,

its primary objective is to encourage the visitors an awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the area and of the resources. This, in turn, raises the quality of visitor experiences and enjoyment. Interpretation, therefore, can be used as a tool to accomplish the very first goal of national parks and equivalent reserves in Thailand. The only question remaining is which resources or subject matters are to be interpreted. Upon management's decisions the proposed interpretive model can be applied to that particular resources or subject matters.

Maintaining the unimpaired conditions of the area and of resources requires various management functions. It depends on an individual park's objectives and particular resources involved. Traditionally, the mainstay within the total management context of a park and other recreation areas comprises such functions as resource protection or preservation, maintenance, enforcement, and visitor services and protection. The evidences cited earlier confirm that interpretation can be applied to these management functions. Thus the second objective of national parks in Thailand could be achieved by the aids of interpretation, if not solely.

To integrate interpretation into the actual park operation and administration, however, is a very difficult task, indeed. The difficulty always arises out from managerial realities such as budgeting, staff relations and communications, and agency's policy (Cherem, 1977; Sharpe and Gensler, 1977), if not from the concept itself. This is true for park situations in Thailand in which funding and related politics are dominant factors controlling decision making process. Too often the

Royal Forest Department regards investments on parks and other forest recreation areas are luxury. Consequently, this leaves park authorities in a difficult situation to fulfill their roles and management goals.

We, the interpreters, must realize that our role is not only helping people enjoy the park, but also helping the agency to achieve the goal of preservation for the use of future generations. By doing so, first, we must convince the administration authorities in the Royal Forest Department, in this case it is National Park Division, that interpretation would fit nicely to the overall park management and operations and help to achieve agency's goals and park's objectives.

Secondly, we must define and accept our role in park administration and must prove our services are useful to park management. This means that we must adjust ourselves as ones of the staff members and employ our skills whenever possible to reduce problems of park management (Dame, 1977; Sharpe, 1976).

Thirdly, we must keep our communication with other individuals involved in park administration and operation. It is essential that we must understand the problems of the staff involved with park functions as cited above. We must recognize that their problems are also our problems. This is a matter of inter-staff relations and communications.

CONCLUSION

Interpretation is the expression of an attempt to unify a park and the resource base of a park and the visitors in order to accomplish the park's objectives and visitors' objectives. It also can be used as a management tool to achieve the agency's objectives. Interpretation and a working model obtained from the concepts is applicable to the management of national parks and equivalent reserves in Thailand. Through a firm knowledge of the model and the relationships of the components, the two differing goals of national parks could be achieved without one threatening the other. It is, however, not a magic tool. It needs to be clarified on a management basis. Some administrative difficulties to which interpretation will be operated are pointed out. The interpreters must prove to the others they are a vital part of the organization and they could help park management to achieve its goals.

REFERENCES

Bethel, Gerald I.
1971. Vandalism : Where Does It Stop? California Parks and Recreation. Vol. 27, no. 5. p. 4-5.

Cherem, Gabriel J.
1977. The Professional Interpreter : Agent for an Awakening Giant. Association of Interpretive Naturalists Journal. Vol. 2, no. 1. p. 3-16.

Dame, Dave.
1977. A Management Viewpoint of Interpretation. A Paper Presented at the 16th Annual AIN Meeting, College Station, Texas.

Dunmire, William W.

1976. Servicewide Goals for Interpretation. In Touch. Vol. 1, no. 12. p. 2-3. National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

Eddy, W.H.

1968. The Interpretive Goals in the National Parks. Park News. Vol. 4, no. 1. p. 13-15.

Elliott, Jerold E.

1978. The Environmental Interpreter--Report of the A.I.N. Competency Task Force. Journal of Interpretation. Vol. 3, no. 1. p. 27-28.

Field, D.R. and J. Alan Wagar.

1973. Vistor Group and Interpretation in Parks and other Outdoor Leisure Settings. The Journal of Environmental Education. Vol. 5, no. 1. p. 12-17.

Field, D.R. and J. Alan Wagar.

1976. People and Interpretation. Interpreting the Environment, Grant W. Sharpe (ed.). John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York. 566 pp.

Fischer, David W.

1966. The Role of Interpretation. Park Practice Guideline. Vol. 5, no. 66. p. 89-92.

Gibbs, Ren.

1977. Living History and Preservation : Incompatible? In Touch. Vol. 1, no. 18. p. 11.

Harrison, Anne.

1976. Problems : Vandalism and Depreciative Behavior. Interpreting the Environment, Grant W. Sharp (ed.) John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York. 566 pp.

National Park Act

1961. Royal Thai Government Act. Vol. 78, Section 80. October 3rd, 1961.

Perry, William L.

1968. Interpretation in the National Park System. Maunal of Outdoor Interpretation, Joseph J. Shomon (ed.). National Audubon Society, New York. 104 pp.

Putney, Allen D. and J. Alan Wagar.

1973. Objectives and Evaluation in Interpretive Planning. The Journal of Environmental Education. Vol. 5, no. 1. p. 43-44.

Ross, Terence L. and George H. Moeller.
1974. Communicating Rules in Recreation Areas. USDA Forest Research Paper NE-297. 12 pp.

Sharpe, Grant W.
1976. An Overview of Interpretation. Interpreting the Environment, Grant W. Sharpe (ed.). John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York. 566 pp.

Sharpe, Grant W. and Gail L. Gensler.
1977. Interpretation as a Management Tool. Paper presented at the Workshop of Association of Canadian Interpreters, Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta. October 14, 1977.

Sharpe, Grant W. and Charles H. Odegaard.
forthcoming.
Interpretation. Outdoor Recreation Management. To be published by John Wiley and Sons, Inc., New York.

Vaux, H.J.
1960. Techniques of Managing Public Use of Forested Areas. Paper presented at Fifth World Forestry Congress, Seattle, Washington. September 1960.

Wagar, J. Alan.
1974. Interpretation to Increase Benefits for Recreationists. USDA Forest Service General Technical Report NC-9. 6 pp.

Weeks, Glen.
1971. Park Ranger Plan Proves Valuable. California Parks and Recreation. Vol. 13, no. 2. p. 4-5.

Young, Robert C.
1970. Establishing of Goals and Definition of Objectives. Elements of Outdoor Recreation Planning. B.L. Driver (ed.). University of Michigan. Ann Arbor, Michigan. 316 pp.