

Campfires and Firewood: A Global Perspective

Dick Cunningham is at it again!

The creative, energetic (does this man ever sleep?) Chief of Interpretation for the NPS Western Region has produced another small interpretive gem—this time a 6-page piece of resource material for interpreters who want to use the traditional campfire as the centerpiece for a program about firewood.

"I need to strongly emphasize," Cunningham says, "that I am **NOT** advocating the abolishment or the reduction of campfire talks. They are an important part of our interpretive history and will continue to be so. What I do want to discuss for your consideration is the use of firewood on a global basis, its environmental impacts, and the relationship to our campfire programs."

The piece begins with a nod to the "something magical" about staring into a blazing campfire, "listening to the pop of the burning wood," smelling the smoke and perhaps groping our way back via these sensations to an earlier stage of human development when fire represented the center of human life.

Then he describes the results of deforestation and fuel-wood cutting in Africa (6 specific countries), Asia (5 countries), and Latin America (5 countries). Twelve selected references are given for the student who wants more. The result could be a sober reflection of how blessed the United States has been, with the "luxury" to burn wood in our home fireplaces and at park campfires. "There is a strong environmental message here," Cunningham says, "that we interpreters should be personally aware of. I further believe it is a message that should be integrated into our campfire talks."

So perhaps the next time someone says "Ranger, throw another log on the fire," Cunningham suggests the response might be: "That reminds me... I have a story to tell you about firewood."