

Editor's Note:

"Interpretation through successful cooperation" was the theme of the Northwest RAIN (Northwest Region Association of Interpretive Naturalists) at their October 1982 workshop in Vancouver, Wash. Within the context of the fiscal restraints that encompass the entire field of natural resources, there are words of wisdom for science and management as well as for interpretation.

One workshop title especially spoke to the commonness of our joint professional dilemma — its title: "And I Also Interpret."

While it has been jolting to many, whose specialized training prepared them for a single task in a mosaic of natural resource management and interpretive tasks, the demand that people "double in brass" has its own special rewards, both for the individuals involved and for the systems in which they serve. The cross-disciplinary information and skill exchanges that occur when one person must perform in several areas and do several tasks, can be a binding force that makes for synthesis and better understanding all around.

Science and the scientific research methodology received their due at the AIN workshop. There was general agreement that the best interpretation of natural resources stems from the best scientific research available, but it was not just an "us looking at it" approach; it also had a strong component of "us looking at us." The research theme was two-pronged: research of subject matter content, and research of audience.

Elsewhere in this issue, Gary Machlis's presentation on cross-cultural interpretation appears. Machlis, sociology project leader of the NPS/CPSU at the University of Idaho, stressed his reliance on natural history techniques in studying behavior patterns among the various categories of park visitors. Instead of simply using questionnaires asking visitors what they feel or how they act, he assigns students to observe and make careful notes on the minute-by-minute behavior of visitors. The results of his studies have important implications for park managers, park interpreters, and concessionaires.

Research for content was the focus of another presentation by Leslie Wildesen, formerly with the U.S. Forest Service and presently in Washington, D.C. on an American Anthropological Assn. fellowship. She described the detailed research that went into her Portland State University course on historic bridges and ferries of the area, and included in her presentation a lively appreciation of the audience pitfalls that such a course might hold.

Context came through at the sessions as a most important part of interpretation — the weaving of specific subject matter into a presentation that has meaning for the audience. Increasing audience sophistication combined with decreasing park budgets poses an awesome interpretive problem, but not an insurmountable one. In cooperation among a wide spread of resource people lie many of the answers to both subject matter and audience understanding.

Roger Clark, project leader for Wildland Recreation Research at the Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experiment Station in Seattle, indirectly endorsed the NPS/CPSU approach when he told conferees in his keynote address: "Cooperation is not a panacea for all problems facing interpreters, but many worthwhile objectives can be achieved by cooperation among managers, researchers, universities, interest groups, and visitors." Here again is expressed the belief that a wider range of input to the interpretive effort results in a broader context for understanding and cooperation.

One specific tool for moving ahead with this approach is the AIN's *Journal of Interpretation*, co-edited by Sam H. Ham and Machlis, both of the University of Idaho. The *Journal* deals specifically with scientific aspects of interpretation and how to bring the two fields into a more efficient, working focus.

The feeling at the workshop's end was that the highest quality of interpretation demands thorough knowledge of both content and audiences, and that many seemingly unrelated goals — of managers, of administrators, and of concessionaires — may be surprisingly well served if the tools of research are brought to bear on better interpretation.