

Basic Interpretation Learning System

Making Connections: The Essence of Interpretation Second Edition

Second edition revised and edited by Joanie S. Cahill and Sara M. Skinner

Primary Authors Carolyn J. Ward and Alan E. Wilkinson

With contributions by California State Parks Staff

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Questions about this handbook or requests for copies should be directed to:

Interpretation and Education Division

California State Parks

PO Box 942896, Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

Phone: (916) 654-2249

interp@parks.ca.gov

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FOREWORD

Interpretation is one of the most valuable means our Department has to accomplish its mission over the long term. At the same time that interpretation is one of our legally mandated responsibilities to the public, it is also among the highest callings of the park profession. The public's need to understand the value and significance of the parks and resources of this state has never been greater, and consequently, the Department's responsibility through its employees to provide high quality interpretive services has become more important than at any other time in its history.

California State Parks' Interpretation and Education Division and the Training Section are pleased to introduce a new and innovative approach to learning about the art and science of interpretation.

This *Basic Interpretation Learning System* represents a major milestone in interpretive training. It provides our Department's first-ever comprehensive, standardized resource for introductory interpretation training. Intended primarily as a foundation for ranger and lifeguard cadets attending Basic Visitor Services Training, it is also a valuable guide for any interpreter who provides programs and services directly to the public. The handbook serves as both a stand-alone resource and as part of a cadet training package that includes companion student workbooks and instructor guides. The application of this learning for cadets is carried over to the Field Training Program in their initial field assignment.

Through this handbook and the related training that accompanies it, the Department is providing you with the tools to realize your full potential as an interpreter. Your active participation in training and learning is the essential ingredient in deriving benefit from this publication and, more importantly, translating its use into your interpretation with the public.

Donna Pozzi

Chief
Interpretation and Education Division
California State Parks

Joanne Danielson

Department Training Officer, Acting
William Penn Mott Jr. Training Center
California State Parks

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

In the ten years since the publication of the Basic Interpretive Learning System created by Alan E. Wilkinson and Carolyn J. Ward, much has changed in the world of state park interpretation. New program delivery methods are now available, thanks to the development of new technologies. Interpretive opportunities and challenges are growing due to social media and the ability to invite virtual visitors to our parks. An expanding body of research emphasizes the effect of the natural environment on the mental and physical health of children, inspiring interpreters to focus their attention on programs of particular interest to the young. Finally, an increasingly frugal state economy has resulted in changes within the organizational culture of California State Parks. These changes have extended interpretive opportunities—and responsibilities—to an ever-widening range of park personnel and partners.

In the second edition to the Basic Interpretive Learning System (BILS), we have restructured and updated several modules. Notably, *Module 4—Planning* is now more closely aligned with state park policies and actual park planning activities. *Module 11—Audiovisual* has also changed substantially; it now includes guidelines and tips on more advanced technologies, such as digital image file formats and image manipulation. The intellectual property rights section has also been expanded and clarified.

The intention of the BILS revision was to create a handbook that would be even more useful to ranger and lifeguard cadets and other beginning interpreters. Toward that end, we consulted with dozens of park professionals who were willing to share the best of their tools, techniques, ideas, and advice based on their experiences. We emphasize the tools and techniques that are especially useful for state park cadets and those beginning their careers as interpreters with California State Parks.

This update could not have been completed without the support and guidance of Donna Pozzi and her staff. We would also like to thank the following valued members of the parks family who shared their time and knowledge to make this book a relevant and useful tool for new field interpreters:

Fred Andrews, Karen Beery, Steve Bier, Brian Cahill, Wes Chapin, Margo Cowan, Carol Cullens, Jenny Donovan, Lindsay Elliott, Scott Elliott, Nina Gordon, Karma Graham, Michael Green, Elizabeth Hammack, Sara Howlett, Wil Jorae, Lorissa Kemper, Brad Krey, Elise McFarland, Lori Martin, Heather McCummins, Nancy Mendez, John Mott, Cate Murphy, Cara O'Brien, Mary Pass, Steve Ptomey, Denise Rist, Jenan Saunders, Carolyn Schimandle, Kathy Searl, Phil Sexton, Ty Smith, Carie Thompson, Samantha Toffoli, Joe von Herrmann, John Werminski, Mike Whelan, and Bill Wolcott.

We wish you great joy and satisfaction as you join the ranks of professional heritage interpreters and venture forth to make connections between your park's resources and its visitors.

Joanie S. Cahill

Regional Interpretive Specialist
Colorado Desert District
California State Parks

Sara M. Skinner

State Park Interpreter II, Training Specialist
Training Section, William Penn Mott Jr. Training Center
California State Parks

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Welcome to the Basic Interpretation Learning System (BILS). This system consists of the Basic Interpretation Handbook, Student Workbook, Instructor Guide, and Field Training Officer Guide. Each component works in conjunction with the others to provide a framework for conducting personal interpretation in California State Parks. The Basic Interpretation Handbook is the central component of the system which all other elements relate. The handbook can also be used as a stand-alone resource, training guide, or reference tool.

BILS provides a unique approach to training and education in interpretation by incorporating nationally accepted theories, standards, and practices with specific California State Parks guidelines and requirements. The result is an instructional system geared toward students, practitioners, trainers, evaluators, and supervisors of interpretation in California State Parks. For those beginning their discovery of interpretation, it provides the history, theories, and basic skills in the art and science of interpretation. For the more experienced practitioners, the Basic Interpretation Handbook provides an in-depth look at improving message formation and a critical examination of evaluation methods and approaches. It also generates discussion of the needs, values, and goals of the profession itself. For managers, administrators, supervisors, and instructors, the BILS serves as a useful reference tool, resource guide, and benchmark for continuing the growth and development of the discipline of interpretation.

Module 1 provides an overview of interpretation. It begins with a brief review of some of the significant people, places, events, and organizations that have influenced the practice of interpretation. It ends with a brief synopsis of the definitions of interpretation and the various types of interpretive services provided in California State Parks. *Module 2—Purpose and Value* provides an in-depth review of the purpose and values of interpretation. It focuses on how interpretation works to connect visitors to the resource and to accomplish management goals and objectives. The basic communication process is the topic of *Module 3—Communication*. The steps of the communication process are examined, and techniques for improving communication effectiveness are reviewed. Once the principles and theories of interpretation are examined, *Module 4—Planning* expands on this basic understanding and provides an overview of the actual planning process for conducting programs.

Module 4—Planning begins the transition from background information and theory (Modules 1-3) to the art and science of practicing interpretation (Modules 4-11). *Module 5—Programs* covers the essential characteristics of the interpretive program. It forms the underlying structure of all interpretive communication and programs. *Module 6—Talks* centers around creating, designing, and conducting talks, and *Module 7—Walks* focuses on the same for interpretive walks. *Module 8—Campfire* captures the art and design of one of the most popular California State Parks programs—campfires. Techniques and skills for conducting these special programs are reviewed in detail. *Module 9—Kids* shifts gears and addresses the needs, challenges, and approaches for conducting programs with children. One of the most common duties performed by the interpreter is walking through the park and talking with

visitors i.e. roving. *Module 10—Roving* conveys the essence of practicing roving interpretation. *Module 11—Audiovisual* provides information on the various types of audiovisual equipment used by interpreters. Tips and pointers for when, where, and how to use the equipment makes *Module 11—Audiovisual* a useful resource and reference tool. The final component of providing interpretive services is to evaluate the effectiveness of that service. *Module 12—Evaluation* introduces the reader to some useful, easy methods that can be implemented to assess the success of programs. *Module 13—Professionalism* ties the entire Basic Interpretation Handbook together by linking the work of interpreters, instructors, evaluators, field training officers, and supervisors with the discipline of interpretation itself. This module on professionalism reviews the rights and responsibilities of an interpreter to the public, the resource, and the science itself.

Our combined experiences, training, teachers, mentors, supervisors, and colleagues have taught us about the essence of interpretation: making connections. The Basic Interpretation Learning System was made possible through the efforts of many other caring, hard-working, and dedicated individuals. In fact, every student of interpretation and visitor to the parks served as a trainer and guide for us as we wrote this system. Although we hesitate to single out individuals because so many have helped make this project a success, there are a few special people that we would like to thank. Broc Stenman and Steve Waggy served as facilitators of this project. They had a vision and helped us create it. We thank Donna Pozzi and her staff for their support throughout this process. We thank Barbara Dolan-Wilkinson, whose tireless efforts, patience, and talent gave this publication graphic and visual life. In addition, although we had numerous editors, the efforts of Patricia Widner, Chris Beresford, Buzz Webb, and Judy Webb went above and beyond the call of duty. They gave us consistency, taught us more about the English language than we ever wanted to know, encouraged us, and were always available to help.

The following are others who helped us make this project a successful point along the continued development and growth of interpretation and its importance in California State Parks: Karen Beery, Jane Bertke, Laurena Cabanero, Brian Cahill, Joanie Cahill, Wes Chapin, Carol Cullens, Michelle Edwards, James Fitzpatrick, Dave Gould, Michael Green, Elizabeth Hammack, Mary Helmich, Ginger Henry, Wil Jorae, Summer Kincaid, John Kolb, Tom Lindberg, Jim Long, Pat McLatchey, John Mott, Donna Pozzi, Laura Reimche, Jenan Saunders, Broc Stenman, John Werminski, and Jonathan Williams.

Finally, we thank our partners, Alan Wilkinson and Carolyn Ward, who endured the grueling hours, lengthy phone calls, meetings, and seemingly endless revisions. Their input and patience is much appreciated and was critical to the success of the final product.

Interpretation is built and founded upon love and passion. We loved creating and co-writing the Basic Interpretation Learning System, and working together on it was a great pleasure. We hope that it helps you develop the skills and techniques necessary for passing the passion on to others. **Making connections is the essence of interpretation, and we hope this connects with you.**

DEDICATION



WILLIAM PENN MOTT, JR. (1909-1992)

- Superintendent of Parks for the City of Oakland (1942 to 1969)
- General Manager of the East Bay Regional Park District (1962 to 1967)
- Director of California Department of Parks and Recreation (1967 to 1975)
- Founder of California State Parks Foundation (1975)
- Director of National Park Service (1985 to 1989)

Americans hold the park ranger in highest regard, and value and look forward to interpretive programs whenever they visit a national park. This relationship between interpreter and visitor, in turn, generates broad support for parks throughout the nation.

William Penn Mott, Jr.

William Penn Mott, Jr. was a visionary. We know this from his work, his words, and how others remember him.

Bill Mott always understood that people preserve those places and things that they love and understand. He also recognized long ago that the keys to understanding are education and communication, two endeavors in which he always excelled. Without his keen ability to communicate the necessity for preserving parks and open space, our natural estate would be infinitely reduced.

Lamar Alexander, 1992

Mott's Principles of Leadership

- Be visionary: guide today's decisions by tomorrow's reality.
- Think creatively: dare to try new and controversial ideas.
- Be assertive: market and sell a quality product.
- Share the credit: hire good people and let them do their jobs.
- Educate your constituency: trust them to make an informed choice.
- Never give up: hold on to your dreams until they come true.

Adapted from *Prophet of the Parks: The Story of William Penn Mott, Jr.* Mary Ellen Butler, 1999

