

Module 10
ROVING



We build too many walls and not enough bridges.

Sir Isaac Newton

Module 10

ROVING

What is it?

Planned, personalized communication with the visitor in an informal setting

Why do we do it?

To personally reach visitors who might not otherwise receive interpretive messages

How do we do it?

Informally contact visitors at the resource and provide an opportunity for communication

INTRODUCTION

Roving interpretation is personalized, face-to-face communication where the audience has chosen the venue, the resource is the stage, and the interpreter is the catalyst for knowledge. Roving provides the means to protect the resource and the visitor, and to ensure a quality recreational experience. This opportunity to chat with visitors may be one of the finest opportunities for you to represent CSP in a positive manner.

Roving interpretation may seem spontaneous, impromptu, unstructured, ad-lib, or unprepared, but this is not the case. When done properly, it is well organized and planned.

Getting to talk to a ranger in person, the perceived authority of the resource, is an invaluable bonus for the visitor. The public's perception of the interpreter roaming at leisure through the park and chatting with visitors is their dream, and is often the iconic perception of what rangers do.

For the interpreter, roving interpretation, including incidental visitor contacts, will far outnumber opportunities to reach people through more formal presentations. These contacts are often the only chance you have to interpret to park visitors, influence behavior, and gain support for park resources. With only about 20 percent of park visitors attending our formal programs, roving is a great opportunity to reach the majority of our visiting public (Knudson, Cable, and Beck, 1995). Roving is the quintessential role for an interpreter and is a lot of fun!

■ ■ ■
*...taking the information station
to where the people are.*

Grant Sharpe

■ ■ ■

In this module, we will explore the benefits and techniques of roving; how to do it, when and when not to do it, and why.

10.1 ROVING FOR SUCCESS

There are multiple reasons for and benefits of roving. Let us explore just a few of the more common ones.

CARPE DIEM!



Carpe diem!

Many times there are seasonal events, phenomena, or special occurrences that take place in the park. Roving provides a perfect opportunity to capitalize on these events. Sharing a fleeting event with another person can be extremely gratifying. This type of sharing and learning can be illuminating and even life changing for you and the visitors. Many visitors who would never attend formal programs are very receptive to these more spontaneous discovery opportunities.

Some roving will be truly spur-of-the-moment, but most of it, while it may seem spontaneous to the visitor, is actually recognized and planned well in advance by the good interpreter. You may not be able to predict rainbows, but you are aware of the local weather patterns; the advantage is yours. Likewise, you may not be able to predict where the gray whale will breach, or even if one will be sighted, but you know their migration patterns and when and where to look. Other seasonal or periodic events—like cactus in bloom, grunion running, a red tide at night, and waterfalls in their full glory—may be easier to predict.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE MOMENT

- Flowers blooming
 - An animal's birth
 - Rainbows
 - Cloud patterns
 - An insect
 - Bird nests
 - Meteor showers
 - Sunset
 - Whale passing by
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VISITOR SAFETY

You can also use roving interpretation to inform visitors of safety issues. By stationing yourself in locations where there are potential hazards (steep cliffs, strong tides, poisonous plants, etc.), you can make the roving effective as an interpretive tool and address safety concerns.



PROTECTING RESOURCES

You can reduce many underlying management issues through the use of roving interpretation. Often, visitors violate park rules because they are unfamiliar with them. The roving interpreter, who may be the first to see the problem brewing, can rectify a transgression long before it becomes a problem.

Direct person-to-person communication can explain management issues and educate the visitor to more fully appreciate the need to comply. Think of all the rules to which the visitor must adhere. Rules can become the instruments of mistrust and elitism if not explained and personalized by the interpreter. It is easier to gain compliance with understanding than with enforcement. That is a role of the interpreter.

In addition to providing information to visitors, interpretation can help with security and protection of the park resources. To the visitor, rules prohibiting feeding the squirrels, dogs off-leash, and picking flowers may seem like annoying aggravations. When the interpreter has an opportunity to explain the reasons behind the rules, not only will visitors more readily comply, but the park may have gained a supporter.

Peace officers have the responsibility to deal with illegal activities. Laws and regulations guide you in the appropriate action to take. How any good interpreter handles a given situation is ultimately up to the interpreter, of course, but good judgment, good listening skills, and an interpretive approach may best serve all involved.

HANDLING THE VISITOR FROM #@*!

- Listen carefully.
 - Think before you act.
 - Maintain control.
 - Analyze the situation.
 - Take appropriate action.
 - Remember that you are a public servant.
 - Do not get emotionally involved
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ADVERTISING FORMAL PROGRAMS

Roving through the campground, trails and throughout the park before your program is an excellent way to invite visitors to attend and to gain valuable insight about the audience. Reach those who may have missed the bulletin boards or other announcements by roving.

Generally, visitors are on vacation and do not want to watch the clock. Your friendly reminder of upcoming activities allows them time to plan to attend if they choose. Additionally, you can provide them with a cognitive map of the activity, including the time, place, and topic. You may also offer useful suggestions, such as bringing their own water, wearing appropriate clothing, or carrying a flashlight. You can learn much more about your visitors by walking through your campground than by driving through it.

The more welcome you make the visitors feel, the more likely they are to attend (Knudson, et al., 1995). Roving provides a wonderful opportunity to reach visitors in the field and increase participation in more formal programs.



Extending a personal invitation is the most direct method.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

One of the clear benefits of roving is public relations. As stated earlier, roving is pure joy for interpreters because they get to meander through the park enjoying the resource and mingling with visitors. It is an opportunity for the public, our constituents, to talk with the person they view as the most knowledgeable about the area. Do not disappoint them; be professional in every respect.

You represent CSP. Your appearance, knowledge, demeanor, approachability, and so many other factors go into making a good impression. Be prepared, and set a high standard of excellence.

LEARNING ABOUT YOUR VISITORS

Visitors to the parks are a valuable resource, but do we truly know and understand their wants and needs? How often during the day do we get to chat with a visitor? Certainly not as often as we would like! Roving through an area and talking with visitors helps us personalize our information delivery. This interchange of dialogue is beneficial for both the visitor and the interpreter. The stalwart tenet for good program delivery is to know your audience. What better way to gain this knowledge than to directly observe and talk with the visitors?

Once you've become familiar with the interests, concerns, typical backgrounds, and characteristics of your visitors, you can incorporate this knowledge into your formal programs. It will also be valuable when creating approaches to management issues. Although the individuals you talk with while roving may not be the same people who attend your more formal walk or campfire program, they certainly offer insight into the wants and needs of the park visitor. Use this valuable knowledge to improve your program delivery.

We have discussed some of the more obvious benefits of roving, including public relations, providing information and education, getting to know your visitor and protecting the resource. Other less obvious benefits include collecting anecdotal information about use patterns, gaining feedback for better park management, developing your communication skills in a non-enforcement/non-bureaucratic setting, allowing you to refresh your sanity, reconnecting with reality and making lifetime memories.

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*What is required is sight
and insight—then you
might add one more: excite.*

Robert Frost

■ ■ ■

WHAT GOOD IS ROVING?

- Builds a sense of ownership through interaction.
 - Gives a personal connection to the place.
 - Serves as a remembrance with take-home value.
 - Seizes the moment (carpe diem!).
 - Protects the resource.
 - Advertises events and activities.
 - Promotes public relations.
 - Allows us to get to know our visitors.
 - Connects management with the visitor.
 - Reconnects staff to the resource.
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10.2 PLANNING

Roving is a planned communication opportunity with visitors in the field. There are several planning elements to roving: location, visitors' needs and interests and interpretive tools/references.

LOCATION

To be a good rover, one needs to know a lot about the area. There is being familiar with the park, and then there is really knowing it. Several visits to a location will begin to open your senses to all of its details—just think of all the discoveries you make each time you return. Now, translate that knowledge of the location by helping the visitor make these and similar discoveries.

Look at a location from various perspectives: the visitor, the interpreter, and the manager. Ask yourself, what is it that draws visitors? If you are new to the park, the first time you walk through the area take notes on what catches your eye. What questions do you have as you walk through? Your observations are probably very similar to those of the visitors.

Examine the resource through the eyes of a manager. Explore how this specific location is part of the overall picture, down to the smallest details. Not only do you need to know about those features that can be viewed or experienced, you should also know about the culture, history, and unseen background aspects. What are the critical issues in your park for managers?

Every park has those places where visitors gather and linger.



And finally, look at the resource through the eyes of an interpreter. What is special about this place? Why was it made a park? Develop a repertoire of mini-stories that you can share. Do your homework. Visit the site often. If you have an “off season” when the location is not quite as busy, this might be an ideal time for you to spend some time doing research.

VISITORS' NEEDS

Experience is a good teacher when it comes to anticipating the needs and interests of the visitor. Some aspects of a location will just naturally be of interest to every visitor while others may be hidden. Address Maslow's human and safety needs first, and then start building on each public interaction, so you can predict what you will be asked next.

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He who asks is a fool for five minutes, but he who does not ask remains a fool forever.

Chinese proverb

■ ■ ■

There is no such thing as a stupid question. No matter how many times you have heard a visitor's question, answer it as if it is the first time you have ever heard it. Be sincere. It may lead to management change, such as addition of a sign, or clarifications on a map.

You have selected this location to rove because it attracts visitors. Ask yourself what it is that brings them to this location. If it is the really big—or the beautiful—or the best—then anticipate what it is the visitor needs to better understand and experience the feature.



KIT BAG

Once you have identified the physical location, the target audience and know what it is you want to accomplish, there is a host of items that might be included in a kit bag of props and aids to help you achieve your goals. Each interpreter and location will dictate what works best.

Consider using an all-purpose day pack or messenger bag for general use, and supplement it with special items for different locations, events, or audiences. Your park might have a vista location

What kinds of hand-held items will help you tell your park's story?

where you want to add a spotting scope, photos, and maps to view points of interest. Another rove might be near a creek where you would want a small collection net, specimen tray, and bug boxes. Tailor your pack with useful items for each location. Aside from the custom items for each location, here are some general suggestions for almost every pack.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

- Hand lens and magnifying glass
 - Field guides and local keys
 - Small plastic bags and bottles
 - Pocket mirror
 - Notebook
 - Map and park information
 - Knife
 - And then there are always binoculars, camera, litter bags, small first aid kit, etc.
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10.3 MECHANICS

Your uniform is a magnet for most visitors. Add a prop or two, a cheerful smile, and a welcoming comment, and you are well on your way to success. Greeting visitors in the manner in which you welcome friends to your home will almost always work.

THAT INITIAL CONTACT

- Smile!
 - Be professional in dress and demeanor.
 - Use a friendly greeting.
 - The ice breaker should make you approachable, not pushy.
 - Avoid yes or no questions and answers.
 - Personalize your contact.
 - Props can draw the visitor into discussions and add interest.
 - Binoculars or a spotting scope are a subtle way to announce that there is something interesting to see.
 - Be visible and capitalize on visitor curiosity.
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WHEN

Roving should be scheduled. This is not to say that informal, face-to-face interaction with visitors should not be a normal activity, but the good interpreter should allocate a specific time to rove.

Roving interpretation should have a focused agenda that best serves the goals and objectives of the park and the interests of the visitors. Scheduled roving ensures that you will actually make the contacts and gives added emphasis that you will spend time one-on-one with the visitor. It also lets other staff know where you will be at a certain time. In some instances, you may even want to advertise to the public that a ranger will be roving in a specific area at a certain time.

■ ■ ■
*The presence of the...person in uniform
is all that is necessary to attract visitors.*

Grant Sharpe

■ ■ ■

WHERE

Webster's New World Dictionary defines rove as "to roam; to wander about; to go from place to place." In our case as well, roving means moving from location to location. Roving is a very effective method to meet large numbers of visitors, especially if you select a location that ordinarily has a high concentration of users. Scenic overlooks, wildlife viewing areas, visitor use facilities, and popular trails are all locations to consider. Do not overlook other special locations your park offers where visitors gather. Use your imagination!

Remember the benefits of roving—protecting the resource, increasing visitor enjoyment, capitalizing on special occurrences, and educating the public—that we discussed at the beginning of the module? Now place yourself where you can best achieve these results.



At Ocotillo Wells SVRA, interpreters set up a portable station and let the visitors "rove" to them.

HOW

Reading the Audience

Be observant when approaching the visitor; some people just want to enjoy the experience without well-meant distractions. You do not want to disrupt the solitude of the moment or the group camaraderie they are enjoying. Generally, the situation will be obvious. Do not force yourself on anyone; know when to approach and when to leave. Just remember to watch for the warning signals and be courteous.

NOT EVERYONE WANTS YOUR INPUT

- Consider not contacting visitors when:
 - They are eating or involved in other activities.
 - They don't make eye contact or look away as you approach.
 - They are obviously in a hurry and don't have time to chat.
 - Their focus is elsewhere.
 - They are already enjoying an activity.
 - Bottom line—respect privacy.
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Making Meaningful Contacts

On every contact, try to personalize your approach. Read the clues of the person and the situation. Look for little things. What is the visitor wearing? Does his or her tee shirt or hat have any slogans? Is he or she carrying a camera, fishing pole, or skis? Are there any indications of his or her home state or country such as vehicle license plates or an accent? Be observant so you can customize the interaction to the individual. Do not forget to watch for any signals that indicate the contact should end.

WHEN TO LEAVE—WARNING SIGNALS

- Nonverbal body language—indications from the face, hands/feet, and posture
 - Conversation lags or strays off the subject
 - Generally don't stay more than 5-10 minutes.
 - Abrupt verbal answers
 - Disengaging
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Once you've put all these techniques to use, you may be so popular that visitors might want you to be their personal guide. How do you end a contact when a visitor wants to keep you there forever? With skill and tactful persuasion! Remind them that you have many visitors to serve and a short time to meet everyone. Thank them for their interest and attention and direct them to a trail or other feature they might enjoy.

10.4 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

ADMINISTRATION

Keep track of the number of interpretive contacts you make. Over time, this will help you and other staff decide when and where to rove by discovering those places that have the greatest potential to connect with visitors. Your numbers can help identify use patterns, traffic patterns, seasonal use and other data that will be useful to your managers and resource specialists.

SUPER INTERPRETER!

Do you have what it takes to be a “super interpreter”? How many of these skills do you exhibit? How about at the end of the season?



- Adaptability of a chameleon
- Vision of an eagle
- Stamina of a bill collector
- Skin of a rhino
- Wits of a fox
- Courage of a lion
- Innocence of a lamb
- Silence of a sphinx
- Tenacity of a bulldog
- Determination of a Brooklyn cab driver
- Complacency of a camel
- Diligence of a beaver
- Nerves of a cow
- Curiosity of a cat
- Friendliness of a child
- Energy of a pup
- Wisdom of an owl

Adapted from NPS training outline

WHAT'S AHEAD?

As we have learned throughout this module, roving interpretation is informal in that you are the primary interpretive tool and your venue is flexible. Let us now switch our attention to a much more formal approach—audiovisual presentations. Next in *Module 11—Audiovisual*, we will discuss audiovisual equipment and suggest some applications for outstanding presentations. Stay tuned!

LITERATURE CITED

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Module 10

ROVING

SELF ASSESSMENT

Answer each question in the section below before reviewing the material in *Module 10—Roving*. The answers are not provided. Check your answers with your colleagues and as you read *Module 10—Roving*. Items from the self assessment may be reviewed and discussed in class.

1) What is roving?

2) What is the average percentage of park visitors that attend formal park programs?

- a) 20%
- b) 40%
- c) 60%
- d) 80%

3) Name four benefits of conducting roving interpretation.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

4) Which of the following are recommended methods of interpretively handling disruptive visitors? (Circle all that apply.)

- a) Listen to their concerns
- b) Do not get emotionally involved
- c) Raise your voice to get attention
- d) Forcefully state the rules

5) When approaching visitors, which of the following practices is/are not recommended? (Circle all that apply.)

- a) Personalize the contact
- b) Use props
- c) Use yes/no questions
- d) Discreetly approach visitors

6) Name three appropriate and constructive locations to rove.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

7) Roving times and locations should be scheduled ahead of time.

a) True

b) False

8) When should you avoid approaching visitors? (Circle all that apply.)

a) Never

b) They are eating

c) They are involved in an activity

d) They look away as you approach

9) Describe two ways of making meaningful personal contact with visitors you do not know.

1. _____

2. _____

10) When making initial contact with visitors, what are four techniques of promoting a positive meeting?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

11) How do you determine when it is time to end a personal contact?

Now that you have completed the self-assessment questions, review the material in *Module 10—Roving* to confirm your answers. After reading the module, move on to the workbook learning activities, which will assist you in developing your skills.

WORKBOOK LEARNING ACTIVITIES

To help you review and apply the material covered in *Module 10—Roving*, a selection of review questions and/or activities is provided. Again, no answers are included. Use the material from the module, outside sources, and your colleagues to help you complete the activities and answer the questions. There may be more than one right answer. Use the questions and activities to generate discussion about the material. Be prepared to discuss, perform, or demonstrate your answers in class.

- 1) As you rove through a campground, an angry visitor approaches you. He is yelling and is very upset about the group camped next to him. He complains that they are loud and have a dog that has not stopped barking. Describe how you should handle the situation.

- 2) What do you think is the greatest benefit of roving? Why?

3) What steps should you take to ensure your safety when roving in the park?

4) List some items that would be beneficial to carry with you at all times when roving.

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Take it to YOUR Park

Answer each question with the information specific to your park. You will have to conduct some research in order to answer each question. Use the answers as a guide for enhancing your career in California State Parks.

ROVING

Park name: _____

- 1) Based on your research, what areas in the park are prime for conducting roving interpretation?

- 2) Are there any special events or seasonal opportunities that occur in your park where roving would be beneficial?

- 3) In terms of resource protection or visitor safety, which locations in the park would benefit the most from an on-site roving presence?
