

Evaluation Brief EB12

November 29, 2007

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Off-site Testing of Temporary Sign Illustration

Overview: The *Trail of Time* team is in the process of developing a temporary sign to welcome and orient people to the Trail. Previous evaluation of the Trail indicated that many visitors tended to not notice the markers, nor take a walking guide. When they did take a walking guide, they tended to glance at it and then put it away to read at a later time. The challenge for the new temporary sign is twofold, a) to get visitors to notice the markers, and b) to model how we want them to use the walking guide and trail.

In preparation for the final production of the temporary sign, a background illustration is being planned. To date, a couple of different versions of this illustration have been developed. Before finalizing the illustration, the evaluation team quickly tested the most current version (above right) with respondents. Because the illustration will be observed quickly by visitors to the rim, we had two primary questions: a) What do respondents look at and notice first? and b) What do they think the illustration is about?

To test this, we told each respondent we were going to give them an illustration and that we wanted to know what was the first thing they looked at. We then handed them the 8½ x 11 illustration and waited for their answer. We then asked them what they noticed second, and third, continuing asking until they mentioned something about the markers, or the group pointing to the markers, etc. We then asked each respondent what they thought the picture was about.

Results: We were surprised that the ten respondents all noticed different things when they first looked at the illustration. Some noticed the canyon rock layers, others the trail, others the trees, and still others the people in the middle. No one however, noticed the markers right off the bat. One respondent declined to tell us what he first looked at, commenting instead: “Wow. It’s complicated.”

When asked what the purpose of the illustration was respondents divided into two distinct groups. Ones who had been respondents in previous off-site tests



of the Trail all got that it was about visitors using a brochure to use the Trail. The ones who knew nothing about the Trail thought it was a picture of “people looking for directions on a path. I assume they are lost” or “people looking at a map on a trail.” Only after a significant amount of time passed did these respondents notice the markers. “What are the kids standing on? It looks like a pothole, or are they kicking a football?”

Analysis: While this test was done with just a few people in locations far removed from the Grand Canyon, and with no additional words or interpretation on the sign, there are clear preliminary indications that many visitors will likely not immediately notice the markers or understand what they are. There are also preliminary indications that many visitors may misinterpret the constructed scenario.

Recommendations:

- Simplify the drawing, eliminating extraneous “information” such as the trees, the extra people, the right-hand side of the trail, and even the canyon walls. We are aware that this will be a difficult idea to accept, but the purpose of the sign is to get visitors to notice the markers, not the rock walls. Visitors will naturally notice the rock walls in the canyon without any help from us, and by including them in the illustration, it draws attention away from the markers and away from the visitors using the walking guide.
- Make the walking guide more recognizable, for example by making it larger, and having a miniature version of it in the woman’s hand with the same colors, format, and photos.
- Ensure the correct orientation of the illustration by flipping it. This temporary sign will be seen by visitors walking from Yavapai towards Grandeur Point, with the Grand Canyon on their right. The

intent is that visitors will look at the markers on the sign, and their eyes will then swing to the right and notice the markers on the real trail, almost as if the trail is an extension of the sign. The current orientation prevents this.

- Enlarge, highlight, or otherwise emphasize the markers so they are more noticeable and so that most visitors notice them first. One solution may be to crop the drawing, something like this.

