**== DRAFT ==**

## Developing Effective Trail Guides and Brochures

### *Different types of brochures are effective for different purposes*

Visitors to parks and other informal outdoor settings are accustomed to finding two broad categories of interpretive brochures:

~ *General appreciation publications* provide information about a general area, rather than a specific trail. An example would be the Grand Canyon publication *Life Along the Rim* which provides an overview of flora and fauna one might encounter during their visit.

~ Trail leaflets or *trail guides* are designed to be used along a particular trail or trail segment that includes numbered posts or identified spots, keyed to short messages listed in order in the *trail guide*. *Trail guides* are not limited to walking trails; there have been some excellent guides designed for use as part of a car tour (Gross, Zimmerman, & Buchholz, 2006).

*General appreciation publications* allow visitors to learn at a time convenient to them, which may be in a car or campsite, often beyond the confines of the park, whereas a *trail guide* is intrinsically tied to the numbered trail. Visitors may leave a *general appreciation publication* in their purse or pocket as they walk a trail, yet the publication may still accomplish its learning goals at a later time. However, if visitors fail to use a *trail guide* as they walk the trail, its learning goals will be missed. To ensure that *trail guides* are used as intended, Gross *et al.* recommend that guide writers "limit the interpretation to the minimum number of stations needed to tell the story. Visitors soon tire of this medium." Their favored example, a road guide to Rocky Mountain National Park, had 12 stops, which they call an optimum number (2006, p. 142).

The current version 2 of the *Trail of Time Walking Guide* seems like a blend between the two extremes defined by Gross *et al.* (2006), including some elements of both *trail guide* and *general appreciation publications*. As such, the *Walking Guide* combines various advantages and disadvantages of both, but will be limited in its ability to provide all the necessary interpretative support for the markers.

### *Recommendations*:

• Design the *Walking Guide* so that visitors clearly recognize that it is a *trail guide* intended to be used as they walk the *Trail of Time*, rather than a *general appreciation publication* that can be pocketed for later use.

• Limit the number of stops to 10 or 12.

### *A brochure only works if visitors pick it up*

Research conducted by Moscardo (1999) tested various distribution methods for informational brochures, including handing a brochure to every visitor, handing a brochure to one member of each group, and leaving piles of brochures in key locations for visitors to pick up on their own. She found that none of these distribution methods was very effective at getting visitors to read the brochure. In spite of Moscardo's disappointing results, studies and reviews of the literature have suggested that visitors will be more apt to pick up brochures that include (a) color; (b) graphics; and (c) a title that is relevant, novel, surprising, humorous, or asks questions (Ballantyne, Hughes, & Moscardo, no date; Moscardo, 1999, p. 5).

Moscardo's data also suggested that visitors would be more receptive to picking up brochures that they perceived as interpretive and informative, rather than promotional. (She had found that many respondents had misperceived the informational brochure that she distributed as promotional.)

***Recommendations*:**
- Design the *Walking Guide* cover with an appropriate title, color, and graphics that will attract visitors and convince them they really need to pick up a copy. Avoid cover designs that could be mistaken for promotional material. Be sure to test prototype various versions of the cover to maximize the likelihood that visitors will pick one up and then use it along the *Trail of Time*.
- Develop, design, and test temporary signage that calls visitors' attention to the *Walking Guide* dispensers.
- Provide back-up dispensers 50 to 100 meters trail-ward from the two main portals, so that visitors who miss getting a *Walking Guide* the first time have a second chance to get one.

## *A brochure only works if visitors read it*

While there is remarkably little research in this area, both studies and informal observations of visitors along trails suggested that "few people read publications on a trail." One explanation for this was that "reading literature while on a nature trail can be unnatural" (Gross, *et al.*, 2006, p. 140). Another explanation may be that few parks have the resources to test prototype versions of their interpretive materials with visitors.

General recommendations for designing brochures that will encourage visitors to read them include:
~ Minimize the amount of text. If there is less text, visitors will read more of it.
~ Use meaningful headings and subheadings.
~ Emphasize important points.
~ Use a conversational style.
~ Make connections to what people already know.
~ Use analogies and metaphors in appropriate ways.
~ Encourage readers to use their senses in ways that support the text's messages.
~ Encourage readers to do things in ways that support the text's messages.
~ Avoid unfamiliar or technical words (Moscardo, 1999; Gross, *et al.*, 2006).

This final recommendation to avoid unfamiliar words will be a particular challenge for the *Trail of Time*, since so many of the place names, rock formation names, names for geologic time intervals, and terms for geologic concepts will be unfamiliar to most visitors. Findings from research and evaluation studies indicate that pronunciation of unfamiliar terms is frequently a barrier to parents reading text out loud for others in their group. This social group behavior is an important meaning-making strategy used frequently in informal learning settings (Gyllenhaal & Perry, 2005).

Finally, Moscardo (1999) suggested that brochure designs must support visitor reading by using appropriate type sizes, achieving appropriate contrast between text and background for the given environment, and avoiding overly reflective, glossy surfaces.

***Recommendations*:**
- Follow the above guidelines to develop concise, clear, and meaningful text for the *Walking Guide*.
- Use meaningful subheadings. Using examples from the current draft of the prototype *Walking Guide*, a subheading like *Oldest Rock in the Canyon* will be more meaningful to visitors than just naming a rock unit, as was done for another subheading (*Grand Canyon Super Group*). Also, make sure subheadings have

enough detail to be meaningful to visitors.  For example, the revised subheading *Growth of Our Continental Crust* will be more readily understood than the current *Formation of Crust.*

- For place names used in the *Walking Guide*, try to be consistent with other Park Service publications. This may be a challenge, since, for instance, the newsprint *Grand Canyon: The Guide* was not always consistent with the glossy Grand Canyon map that was also handed out at park entrances.  We recommend following the expanded place names included on the glossy Grand Canyon map, where, for instance, the smaller Grand Canyon Village map is labeled with "Verkamps Curios" rather than just "Verkamps" and "Yavapai Point and Observation Station" rather than just "Yavapai Observation Station."  We also recommend adding "Shrine of the Ages" near the midpoint of the *Trail of Time*, as this feature is shown on both *The Guide* and the glossy map.
- Avoid the use of unfamiliar abbreviations, e.g., CVIP for "Canyon View Information Plaza."
- Test unfamiliar words such as *Coconino* and *Supai* with visitors to identify which terms are difficult to pronounce when reading aloud.  Provide phonetic pronunciations for these terms.
- In addition to testing the *Walking Guide* for maximum visitor understanding and use, also test the graphic design for legibility under both bright sun and clouds, and with young and old visitors.

**References**

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