

# Introduction to Heritage Interpretation



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## Why interpretation?

A screenshot of a website for the 'INTERPRETATION: MANAGEMENT AND PRACTICE MSc' course. The background image shows an interior wooden structure, possibly a museum or heritage site. The website header includes the University of the Highlands and Islands logo and navigation links for COURSES, STUDY WITH US, CAMPUSES, RESEARCH, and BUSINESSES. The main heading is 'INTERPRETATION: MANAGEMENT AND PRACTICE MSc'. Below this is a navigation menu with buttons for Summary, Content, Study mode, Fees/funding, Career, and Apply. A purple banner at the bottom contains the text 'What is special about this course?' and 'Entry requirements', with a small note below: 'An honours degree or above, a postgraduate diploma or a professional qualification'. There is also a small URL '0% A with MSc Interpretation: Management' visible at the bottom left.

## Why interpretation?




**interpret europe**  
 European Association for Heritage Interpretation


**unesco**  
 Chair

**Interpret Europe conference 2024**

**Sustainability: Challenging mindsets through heritage interpretation**  
 21-24 March 2024 in Koper, Slovenia #iecon24

## HI in CZ

- Czech Association for Heritage Interpretation (\*2011)



  
 Sdružení pro interpretaci místního dědictví ČR  
 Czech Association for Heritage Interpretation

- Czech Institute for Heritage Interpretation (\*2016)

  
 Ústav pro interpretaci místního dědictví ČR  
 Czech Institute for Heritage Interpretation



## What we do: Trainings



## Research & interpretive planning





## This lecture

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- Freeman Tilden coining the methodology
- What is heritage interpretation and how it differs from environmental education
- Adding to Tilden's principles
- Thematic interpretation
- Disciplines of heritage interpretation
- Current discourse

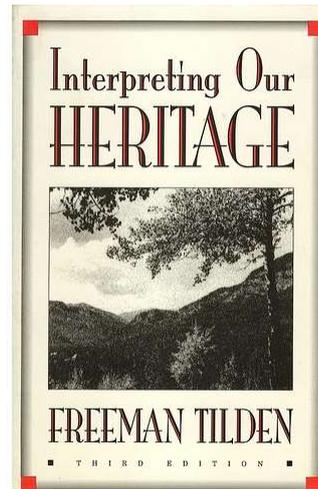
## Search for methodology

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- 'While a guide on Long's Peak I developed what may be called the poetic interpretation of the facts of nature. Scientific names in a dead language together with classifications that dulled interest were ever received, as they should have been, with indifference and lack of enthusiasm by those who did not know. Hence, I began to state information about most things in the form of its manners and customs, its neighbours and its biography. (Mills 1920)
- 'There is hope that new methods will be discovered, and that the national parks will become the great universities of the out-of-doors for which their superlative scientific exhibits so finely equip them. (Bryant, Atwood 1932)

## HI Methodology Born

Mission 66  
National Park Service  
1955-1966



## Tildens's Principles of Interpretation

- 1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or being described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.



## Tildens's Principles of Interpretation

- 2. Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.

*"... it should also be acknowledged that once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery."*

Shama 1996, Landscape and Memory

## Tildens's Principles of Interpretation

- 3. Interpretation is an art which combines many arts whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.

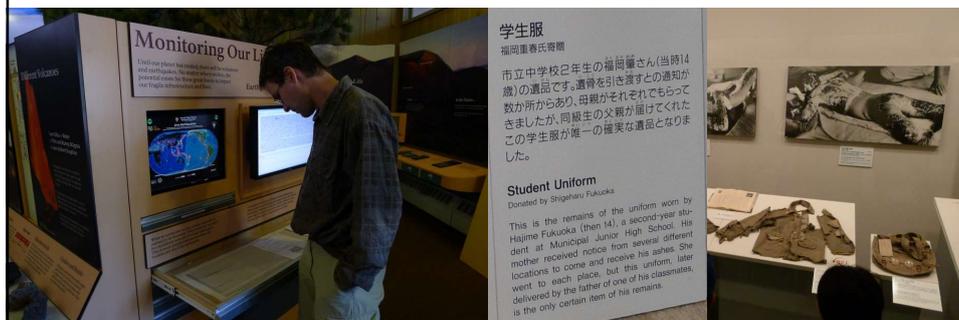


## Tildens's Principles of Interpretation

- 4. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
- *Education is process of deliberate and purposeful influencing of conditions that enable optimal development of an individual to become authentic, integrated and socialized character. (Pelikán, 1995)*

## Tildens's Principles of Interpretation

- 5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.



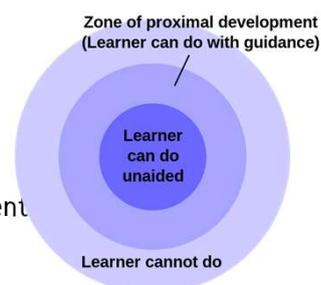
## Tildens's Principles of Interpretation

- 6. Interpretation addressed to children should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.



## Refining Tildens's classification

- sensori-motor (0-yrs)
  - touch of nature
- pre-operational (2-6 yrs)
  - intuitive thinking, fabulation plays important role
  - activities, exploration, hands-on, limited ability of classification and categorizing
- concrete-operational (7-11)
  - enormous ability to gain information
  - ability of classification
  - limited ability to consider alternatives
- Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development
  - => learning is a social process (Phil Race)



## What is heritage interpretation

Freeman Tilden, 1957

*"an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience and by illustrative media"*

Don Aldridge, 1975:

*"the art of explaining the significance of a place to the public who visit it in order to point out a conservation message"*

## What is heritage interpretation

Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage:

○ *"is the **process of explaining** to people the **significance** of the place or object they have come to see, so that they enjoy their visit more, **understand their heritage and environment** better, and develop a more **caring attitude to conservation**."*

Centre for Heritage Interpretation (Scotland):

○ *Interpretation is the **process of communicating** messages about our cultural and natural heritage and **inspiring** audiences with a **wider understanding** of their environment.*

National Association for Interpretation (USA):

○ *Interpretation is a **purposeful approach to communication** that **facilitates** meaningful, relevant, and inclusive **experiences** that **deepen understanding, broaden perspectives and inspire engagement** with the world around us.*

## What is not HI - infotainment



## What is not HI - edutainment



## Broadening of the principles

Beck & Cable (2002):

- Interpretation for **children, teenagers and seniors** – when these comprise uniform groups – should follow fundamentally different approaches.
- **High technology** can reveal the world in exciting new ways. However, incorporating this technology into the interpretive program must be done with foresight and care.
- Interpreters must concern themselves with the **quantity and quality** (selection and accuracy) of information presented. Focused well-researched interpretation will be more powerful than a longer discourse.
- Before applying the **arts in interpretation**, the interpreter must be familiar with basic communication techniques. Quality interpretation depends on the interpreter's knowledge and skills, which should be developed continually.



## Broadening of the principles

Beck & Cable (2002):

- The overall interpretive program must be capable of attracting support – financial, volunteer, political, administrative – whatever support is needed for the program to flourish.
- Interpretation should instill in people the ability, and the desire, to **sense the beauty** in their surroundings – to provide spiritual uplift and to encourage resource preservation.
- Interpreters can promote optimal experiences through **intentional and thoughtful program** and facility design.
- **Passion** is the essential ingredient for powerful and effective interpretation – passion for the resource and for those people who come to be inspired by the same.

## Specifics of interpretation

- Works in the field of informal education
  - voluntarily participation in the programme,
  - different level of knowledge and experience among participants,
  - visitors quickly move their interest elsewhere,
  - highly competitive free time market,
  - is neither infotainment nor edutainment, it has got clear mission (protection of natural & cultural heritage)
- Unlike with programmes for schools we work with non-captive audiences

## Captive vs. non-captive audiences

Differences between Captive and Noncaptive Audiences	
Captive Audiences	Noncaptive Audiences
Involuntary audience Time commitment is fixed External rewards important Must pay attention Will accept a formal, academic approach Will make an effort to pay attention, even if bored	Voluntary audience Have no time commitment External rewards not important Do not have to pay attention Expect an informal atmosphere and a nonacademic approach Will switch attention if bored
<b>Examples of motivations:</b> grades diplomas certificates licenses jobs/employment money advancement success	<b>Examples of motivations:</b> interest fun entertainment self-enrichment self-improvement a better life passing time (nothing better to do)
<b>Typical settings:</b> classrooms job training courses professional seminars courses required for a license (e.g., driving)	<b>Typical settings:</b> parks, museums, zoos, aquariums, etc. informal education programs at home watching television, listening to radio, reading a magazine

Figure 1-2. Typical characteristics of captive and noncaptive audiences.

Ham 2013:13

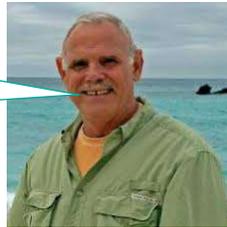


## Thematic interpretation

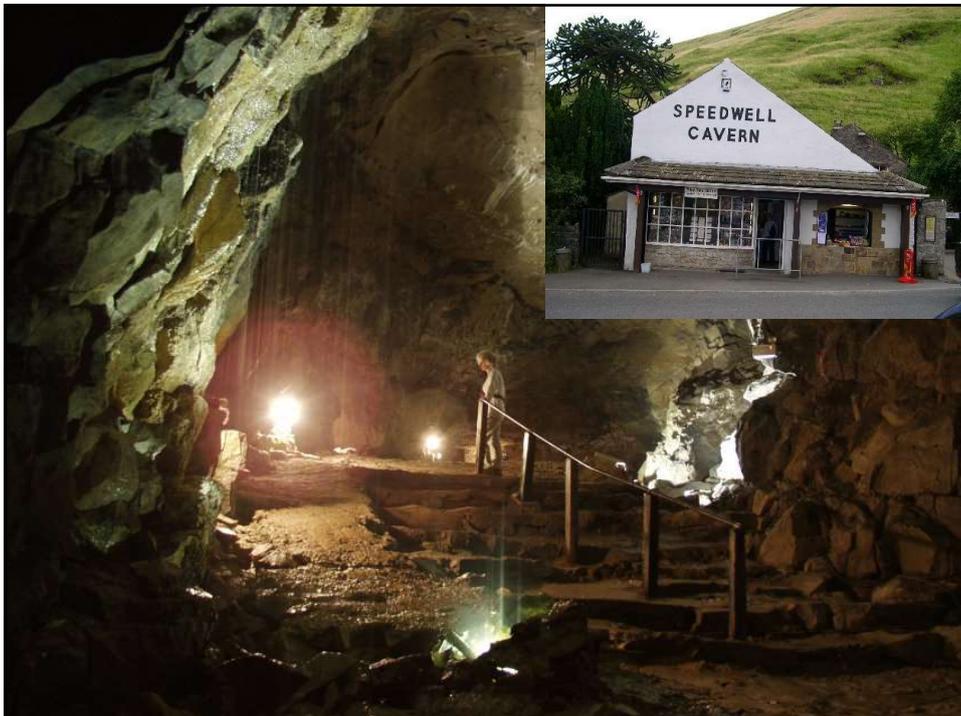
## QUALITY INTERPRETATION

- has a **strong theme**,
- is well **organized**,
- is **relevant**,
- is enjoyable.

I call this a TORE model.



Ham, 2013



## TORE - THEME

*Speedwell Cavern was not only the most unprofitable lead mine in the world, but it also reminds us of industry that brought death to many poor families*



## TORE - MAIN THEME

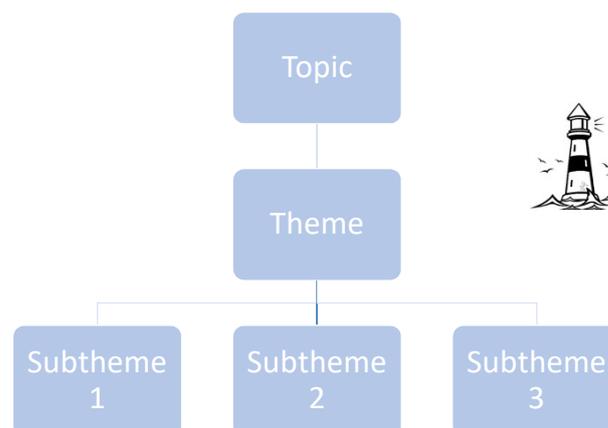
- simplifies preparation of interpretive programme
- eliminates fragmented experience (supports concentrated attention)
- eliminates information overload
- creates logical frame for visitors' experiences
- **strong main theme**
  - high probability to address programme participants (=> provoke thinking)

## TORE – HI IS ORGANIZED

- we are more reactive to information we understand,
- new information are much better retained, if within logical structure (= are easy to follow)
- we are not able to make sense out of more than



### Thematic interpretation structure



## MAIN THEME – CZECH EXAMPLES

Předmět	Hlavní sdělení (1)	Podrobnější sdělení (může jich být více, zpravidla 5–9)
NPR Jizerskohorské bučiny	NPR Jizerskohorské bučiny je nejrozsáhlejším a ekologicky nejcenějším souvislým komplexem lesa s převahou buku v Čechách.	Horní hranice výskytu buku lesního je ohrožena vlivem odlesnění náhorní plošiny Jizerských hor. Přemnožená vysoká zvěř je vážným problémem při obnově lesa v NPR Jizerskohorské bučiny. NPR Jizerskohorské bučiny je jedním z mála míst, kde hnízdí čáp černý.
Užovka obojková	Ačkoliv je užovka obojková naším nejhojnějším a nejznámějším hadem, patří mezi ohrožené živočichy.	Užovka obojková zřídka kdy kouše, ale snaží se útočnicka zahnat prudkými pohyby těla a nepříjemným zápachem. Patří mezi hady s nejsevernějším výskytem – můžeme ji najít až za polárním kruhem! Vysušování mokřadů a kosení rákosin ohrožuje výskyt užovky obojkové u nás.
Průrva Ploučnice	Průrva Ploučnice je starým technickým dílem a kulturní památkou.	Průrva Ploučnice patří k nejromantičtějším místům na celém toku řeky. Záměr, který budovatelé umělého koryta sledovali, se nikdy nepodařilo naplnit. Již v 19. století byla průrva Ploučnice turistickou atrakcí.

## Exercise

### Choose one theme about brown bear and devise subthemes

**Topic:** brown bear

**Possible themes:**

- Brown bear is again migrating to parts of Europe where he was made extinct.
- Brown bear survives because of its excellent hunting skills.
- Brown bear illustrates, how humans change their attitudes towards nature.
- Brown bear was part of life and beliefs of our ancestors.
- Brown bear is overcoming fear and forages close to humans.
- ...

Exercise: Choose 1 theme about brown bear and devise subthemes

**Topic:** brown bear

**Main theme:**

- Brown bear is again migrating to parts of Europe where he was made extinct.

**Subthemes:**

- Brown bear is migrating because humans changed their opinion about them.
  - Brown bear is migrating because weaker males are pushed away from their territory by stronger ones.
  - Brown bear is well prepared for migration because it can walk up to 50 km a day.
  - Brown bear can adjust to different places since it can eat wide variety of food.
- ✚ Bear was a sacred animal for Slavish people so their could not call it by a name.

## MENTAL CAPACITY

- George Miller (1956): „on average people are capable of making sense out of only five to nine separate and new ideas at one time“
- Nelson Cowan (2001) – revised to 3 to 4

## TORE – RELEVANT

- Interpretation is meaningful
  - resonates with my knowledge = is within my context,
  - I can understand the message.
- Interpretation is personal
  - touches my emotions = uses universal concepts = extreme emotions (love, heroism, friendship) & basic biological imperatives (birth, death, hunger, mystery,



## TORE - ENJOYABLE

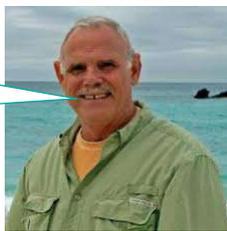
- Enjoyable programme does not mean funny or lighthearted, it must be entertaining within the context => meet expectations of the audience.
- passion and genuine interest are the cornerstones of quality interpretation.



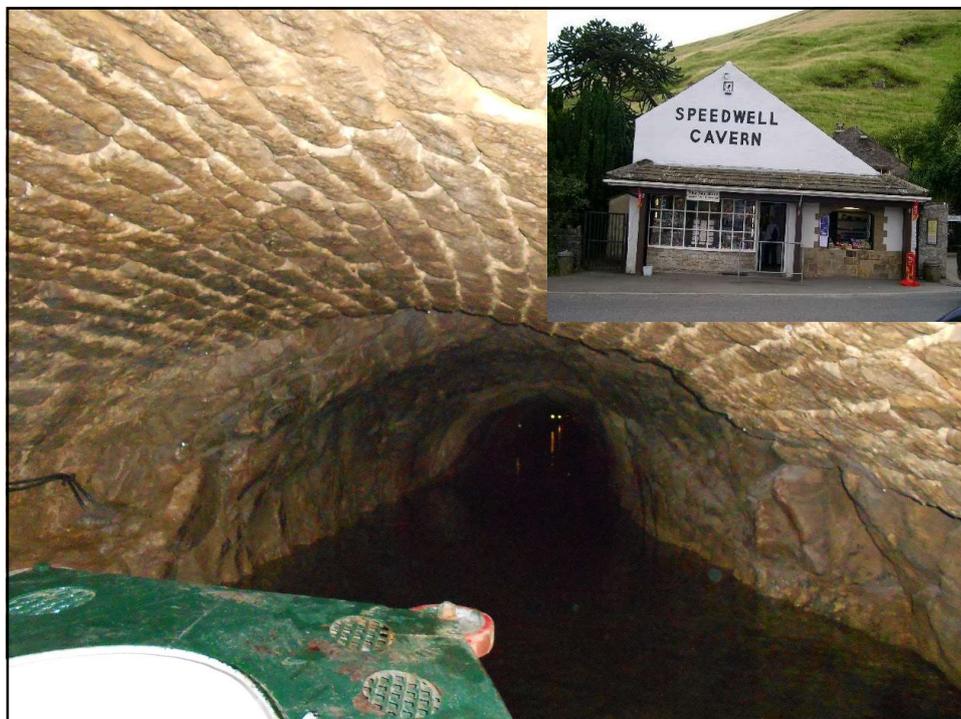
## QUALITY INTERPRETATION

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## WHY WAS THE PROGRAMME IN SPEEDWELL CAVERN SUCCESSFUL?

- Concentrated visitors' attention to only one topic: led mining.
- Used simple language and logical storyline.
- Narrative touched personal themes: success/failure, health, death, hard work.
- The guide was able to moderate visitors' expectations.

## Disciplines of HI

- Guiding 
- Writing 
- Planning 
  - Visitor studies
  - (Exhibition) design
- Live interpretation
- Hosting 
- ...



THEMATIC INTERPRETATION STRATEGY  
AUSTRALIAN ALPS  
Creating strong links between European Geoparks and the Australian Alps  
Prepared for the Australian Alps National Landcare Inc.



## Contemporary topics in HI

- Aims and quality
- Accessibility
- Authenticity
- New media
- Manipulation
- Follow-up relationship with a visitor
- Inclusiveness, participation, universal values



Thank you for your attention

Looking forward to our possible F2F meeting

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