



Study Tour of Archeological Interpretation

2. Interpreters and Archeologists Working Together

Shared role in resource stewardship

Goal: To understand the goals of interpreters and archeologists working together.



Archeologists and interpreters at Fort Vancouver. NPS photo

Archeological resources are important and often popular elements of many of our nation's parks and historical sites. Every year, millions of visitors come to national parks seeking to know more about the past. Each visit and each visitor offers an opportunity to create an interpretive experience that is effective and accurate. The shared abilities and knowledge of archeologists and interpreters who work together can significantly affect and enhance how the public approaches new, unfamiliar, or difficult material. Furthermore, the process often shows the public new ways of looking at old problems and provides a unique perspective on the past.

When interpretation succeeds, it allows people to make meaningful emotional and/or intellectual connections with the people and places of the past. The ultimate goal of the interpretation of archeological resources is to help the public develop or strengthen a sense of stewardship and stakeholderhood in the protection of archeological resources. (See [NPS Module 440: Effective Interpretation of Archeological Resources](#).)

Archeologists and interpreters who are successful at effectively interpreting archeology, develop and maintain dialogue with each other about what they do, how, and why. Together they analyze the potential impacts of interpretive programs on the resources, balancing on-site visitor experience with the cumulative and potentially damaging impacts of visitation. They also work together to analyze and understand the messages that interpretive products convey about the archeological past, and seek new and more inclusive ways for visitors to make connections with the past.

Consider the following points from the [Inspiring Guide](#).

Overall goals for shared training in archeology and interpretation

- Convey archeological information to visitors in an understandable and usable manner
- Identify and appropriately present multiple perspectives, or direct visitors to sources for discovering multiple perspectives
- Work together to develop programs about archeological subjects
- Develop suitable presentations and/or media about archeological subjects for a variety of audiences

Objectives of teamwork between archeologists and interpreters

- Create well-balanced, holistic interpretive plans that accurately reflect management concerns, attention to all resources, and address major park themes
- Integrate current archeological information into interpretive services
- Work toward mutual understanding of interpretive themes, techniques, and opportunities
- Actively contribute or solicit input from other experts to produce or present well balanced interpretations
- Frequently interact and discuss the status of archeological projects, programs, actions, and how they might be relevant to interpretive programs
- Create training opportunities (formal or informal) for park interpreters, keeping them apprised of current investigations, new theories, and possible conflicting explanations about the park's archeological record

Why interpret with archeology?

Archeological resources offer a wide variety of interpretive tools and techniques to work with the public. Tours, exhibits, excavations, publications, web sites, and lectures are some of the most frequent types of programs used in parks and museums. They help make the archeological heritage in parks and museums accessible and available to everyone. When interpreters and archeologists work together, these programs have the greatest success of conveying accurate and meaningful information to the visitor, as well as fostering a stewardship ethic towards archeological resources.

Expanding the interpretive and archeological repertoire at a park enables archeologists and interpreters to exercise their creativity and think like a visitor rather than an expert. In the following

sections you will have the opportunity to experience and think through the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and impact of different interpretive programs that present archeology. This process, based on the principle of a shared role in resource protection, is designed to expand your understanding of issues in archeological interpretation and broaden your “toolkit” for developing more effective, active, and creative interpretive products.

For your information

Review the resources and tools of archeology and interpretation in these pages

- [What is material culture?](#) Learn about what constitutes an archeological resource. These materials become the medium for interpretation.
- [Tools for Interpreters:](#) Find out about the tools interpreters use to discuss cultural resources and topics of significance with the public.

For a refresher on what archeologists and interpreters do, visit:

- [What is interpretation?](#)
- [What do interpreters do?](#)
- [What is archeology?](#)
- [What do archeologists do?](#)

For your consideration

- Refer to the goals and objectives from the Inspiring Guide reiterated in the *For Your Information* sections.
- Choose a few of the statements above that address your concerns for archeology and interpretation at your site, and explain why. For example, do you see teamwork or problems with cooperation and communication? Have you observed specific gaps in the interpretive program that need to be addressed? How might you and your colleagues meet the challenges you face?