



# INKLINGS

Bulletin of Interpretive Ideas

Summer 2012, Volume 12, Issue 3

## Current Project List

- **Michigan Department of Natural Resources**  
*Interpretive Planning,*  
Milliken State Park  
(through Smith Group/JJR)
- **W. Lafayette Parks and Rec. (IN)**  
*Interpretive and Orientation Sign Project*  
Wabash Heritage Corridor
- **City of Bluffton (IN)**  
*Interpretive Sign Design*  
Wabash Floodplain
- **Fremont Public Library**  
*Interpretive Sign Design*  
Prairie
- **Park Forest Parks Dept. (IL)**  
*Interpretive Sign Project*  
Rail Fan Park
- **Bloomington Parks and Recreation (IN)**  
*Interpretive Sign Design*  
B-Line Trail
- **Indiana Department of Natural Resources**  
*Interpretive Exhibit Design*  
Turkey Run SP  
  
*Interpretive Sign Design*  
Indiana Dunes SP

INKLINGS is available in pdf format. To get on the pdf list, contact [lise@interpretiveideas.com](mailto:lise@interpretiveideas.com)

## Trends in interpretation equals changes in park design

Over the past several years, there has been a shift in how people engage in interpretive activities. Visitors want to maintain control of their time and level of participation. As a result, traditional programs such as a “2-hour geology hike” have experienced a decline in participation. For many, these types of programs require a commitment they are unwilling to make.

### What DOES work?

Interpretation has responded to this change. Two responses:

1. *Roving Interpretation.* Instead of requiring the public to come to them, the interpreter goes to the public. Roving interpretation occurs in the high use areas such as beaches, or at significant park features (overlooks, caves, historic structures). The roving interpreter is available to answer questions. Props such as a live animal, mineral samples or historic artifacts are displayed and discussed in a “Show and Tell” format. A demonstration or quick activity may be set up. Visitors can participate for as long as they want, or not at all.

2. *Special Events.* Special events are thematic with multiple activities occurring simultaneously. For example, an historic special event could include a period music performance, a farm equipment demo, an historic food booth and a take-home craft project. All of these are ongoing over a several hour period. Visitors can come and go at any point.

### What does this mean for park design?

Park planners can respond to these changes by designing the amenities needed for successful interpretation.

*For roving interpretation:*

1. **Presentation Area.** Develop a defined presentation area for the interpreter at those locations where roving interpretation is most successful. This could be as simple as a brickwork circle.
2. **Raised platform.** Create a central raised platform for the interpreter to stand on for greater visibility when showing a live animal.
3. **Roofed Area.** A small roofed area with a table for demonstrations or craft activities protects visitors from the rain and sun.
4. **Secure storage space.** A storage shed or room in an adjacent building prevents the roving interpreter from having to haul props and supplies to the location.

*For special events:*

1. **Open Spaces.** Design a large mowed or surfaced area with enough room for booths, activity set-ups and a good traffic flow.



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2. Concert Areas. Provide a stage area with fixed seating or a space for folding chairs and blankets.

3. Electricity. Electricity is needed for lighting, microphones and speakers, A/V equipment, power tools, food concessions and for vendors accepting credit cards.

4. Roofed Areas. Some adaptable spaces with roofs or awnings removes the need for tent rental set-up and take down. The space could be a farmer's market one day and an art show the next.

5. Vehicular access. Vendors and concessionaires need to be able to load and unload tents, supplies, food, tables, etc.

6. Parking and restroom facilities. Make it easy for people to come and stay awhile.

Changes in visitor behavior challenges us to change the way we provide interpretive experiences. This shift occurs not only at the program level, but also in park design.



*Adaptable roofed spaces can serve a variety of functions.  
Bloomington, IN Farmer's Market*