



INKLINGS

Bulletin of Interpretive Ideas

Fall 2011, Volume 11, Issue 3

Interpretive Sign Placement: *Don't block the view*

Current Project List

- **City of Hobart, Indiana**
Hobart Dam interpretive signs
- **Logansport Mem. Hospital**
Interpretive Sign Mgmt.
- **Indiana Department of Natural Resources**
Interpretive Exhibit Mgmt.
Ft. Harrison SP
Indiana Dunes SP

Interpretive Planning *Brookville Reservoir*

Interpretive Signs *Pokagon State Park, CCC Camp, Trine Fen*

Chain O' Lakes State Park, Schoolhouse

Charlestown State Park, Portersville Bridge

Interpretive Brochure *Charlestown State Park; Portersville Bridge*

I recently read a magazine article featuring the Civil War battle at Manassas. The opening photo showed a foggy dawn landscape with a cannon poised for battle. The photo could have taken me back in time – the sound of battle cries, the smell of gunpowder – except for one thing. Right in the middle of the photo was an interpretive sign.

My photographer friends complain about the increased difficulty in taking a photo that doesn't include power lines or cell towers. They have also grumbled about interpretive signs blocking an otherwise unobstructed view.

Photographers aren't the only ones whose experience is diminished.

An interpretive experience should result in an emotional or empathetic connection with the site. When viewing an historic site, viewers should be taken back in time. When viewing a landscape vista they should be filled with awe. Placing a sign in the middle of the view makes that personal connection harder to achieve. The sign becomes a distraction.

Interpretive panels should help build a connection to the view, without being part of the view.

Wherever possible, install an interpretive sign where people will encounter it, but back from the feature. For example, place an
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Above: Placing a sign within a memorial and burial site detracts from the solemnity of the site.



Left: Placing this sign back from the home instead of by the front door would allow visitors to view the home as its owners would have viewed it in the 1800s.

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historic home sign at the yard gate instead of right by the front door. Place a canyon vista sign closer to the parking area instead of at the edge of the canyon.

Keeping the sign back from the view will enhance the visitor's experience with the site . . . and will keep the photographers happy.

Lesson Learned:

Where possible, place interpretive panels back from the feature so that the sign doesn't become part of the view.



This sign placement is back from the historic home, so that visitors can better experience the home in its historic setting. (photo by Barbara Cummings)