



# INKLINGS

Bulletin of Interpretive Ideas

Winter 2013, Volume 13, Issue 1

## Current Project List

- **Community Foundation of St. Clair County (MI)**  
*Interpretive Plan and Sign Design,*  
*Upper St. Clair River Habitat Restoration Project*  
*(with Smith Group/JJR and MI Natural Features Inventory)*
- **W. Lafayette Parks and Recreation (IN)**  
*Interpretive and Orientation Sign Project*  
*Wabash Heritage Corridor*
- **The Nature Conservancy**  
*Interpretive Sign Design*  
*Kankakee Sands Project (IN)*
- **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*  
*Spring Mill SP*  
*Lincoln SP*  
*McCormick's Creek SP*

## Too Much Text:

*Don't make your next sign a "Brochure on a Stick"*

by Lise Schools

Several years ago, I wrote about the need for brevity in interpretive sign text. Nine years later, the issue remains a common problem in sign design.

### Here are the reasons:

1. We all love our sites. We want visitors to know everything about it.
2. We are the site experts. We can go into great detail.
3. We don't understand the advantages and limitation of an interpretive sign. A sign is a visual aid. It is all about graphics, a quick overview, a hook.

### The problem with too much text:

People don't read a text-heavy sign. Our readers are a voluntary audience. They are visiting our sites to hike, relax, enjoy the view. They are with family and friends, enjoying conversation, chasing kids, picnicking. They will not approach a sign that has too much text on it. Even at a distance, they make the decision that the time investment is too great. They pass it by.

### How much is too much?

There is no rule of thumb, but one federal agency required a 150 word maximum for a 36" x 24" sign. I find that a 36" x 24" panel gets claustrophobic after 250 words. Graphics get smaller. The minimum 24 point font crowds the margins. The sign loses its visual advantages.



*This 36" x 24" sign has approximately 800 words on it. To fit the text, the graphics are small. The text has been reduced beyond the 24 pt. minimum recommended by the ADA.*



*This sign has a word count of 219. Large colorful graphics attract the reader from a distance. Twenty-four point font on the smallest print is easy to read.*

Harris Nature Center, Okemos, MI  
by Interpretive Ideas

### Strategies to keep word count under control.

1. Stick to one theme with 2-3 points to support it.
2. Use a graphic, map, diagram or photo to make your points, using text sparingly. Remember: "a picture is worth a thousand words".
3. Provide a "for more information" opportunity on the sign for those who want more depth.
4. Edit, edit, edit.

### Can't do it?

Consider whether a sign is the best choice for your message. A brochure, audio  
*(continued next page)*

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



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Interpretive Ideas

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or other media can tell a bigger story. Brochures are something that can be taken home and read later.

Writing less is more difficult than writing more. Taking the time to clarify a concise message and conveying the message succinctly and visually will ensure the success of your sign.

(This article is 352 words long.)

**LIMESTONE AND ELEPHANTS**  
Transporting heavy freight out of Bloomington required close proximity to railroad tracks.

**Limestone**  
Beginning in the late 1800s, limestone replaced wood as a building material. Limestone is quarried and cut in large blocks and used in many ways. It is used in the construction of buildings, bridges, and roads. It is also used in the production of cement and glass.

**Elephants**  
The Gentry Brothers, Famous Shows, Elephants, Tigers and other circus animals spent the winter two blocks west of this location.

**The Fagen Stone Company**  
The limestone building on the southwest corner of Double and Monroe street served as offices for the Fagen Stone Company. This mill was located on the east side of the track from Double street toward State St.

**The Circus Did It First**  
Circus did not have trucks as large that allowed animals to be hauled down the length of the track. Heavy loads of ore transported this way.

**The mill had several owners**  
1922 - 1933 Alexander King Stone Company  
1933 - 1960 Fagen Stone Company  
1960 - 1967 Victor Oakley Stone Company

*This sign has 230 words of text.*

Bloomington (IN) B-Line Trail, by Interpretive Ideas