



# INKLINGS

Bulletin of Interpretive Ideas

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## Being a Vandal for a Day

### Types of sign vandalism and treatment

Lise Schools, Owner, Interpretive Ideas

#### Current Project List

- **Indiana Department of Natural Resources.**  
Interpretive Sign Design,  
Brown County SP  
Charlestown SP  
Fort Harrison SP  
Patoka Reservoir  
Shakamak SP  
Shades SP  
Turkey Run SP  
Mounds State Park  
Wyandotte Caves  
Clifty Falls SP  
Interpretive Master Plan,  
Turkey Run State Park
- **Champaign County (IL) Forest Preserve District**  
Interpretive Sign Design
- **Westfield (IN) Parks and Recreation**  
Interpretive Sign Design
- **Park Forest (IL) Parks and Recreation**  
Interpretive Sign Design
- **Logansport (IN) Memorial Hospital**  
Interpretive Sign Design
- **Kalamazoo Nature Center (MI)**  
Trail Map Design
- **Elkhart County (IN) Parks**  
Interpretive Sign Design
- **Eli Lilly & Company (IN)**  
Interpretive Sign Design

In November, I conducted an interpretive sign workshop at the National Assn. for Interpretation conference. Many of the participants were from federal parks in the western United States. A discussion started with:

*“What do you do when a bison herd stampedes over your sign?”*

*“And signs make great scratching posts too.”*

*“And how about when prairie dogs build a town beneath your signs causing your signs to sink into the ground?”*

I had no idea there were so many four-legged vandals. The vandals I deal with are primarily two-legged.

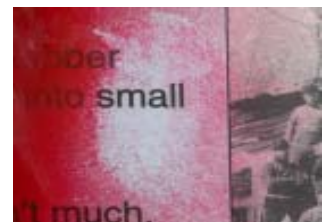
According to the 1998 report from the U.S. Department of Justice, vandalism costs \$15 billion annually. A 1996 FBI Report on vandal demographics described vandals as typically male (89%), younger than 16 (63%), and Caucasian (83%). Socio-economic backgrounds were equally represented. In 1996, there were 141,600 arrests of vandals under 18 years of age.

When meeting with a client, the question of vandalism and vandal-resistant sign materials inevitably arises. The technical specifications provided by the manufacturer list vandalism remedies, but I’d never tried them out myself.

So, at the same conference, I jumped at a chance to attend a session where we were allowed to vandalize signs and then try out the manufacturer’s recommendations. We were given the tools to burn, scratch, smash and write on various sign materials. No guns were allowed in the conference center, but we watched a video of all of the materials being shot.

#### Surface Graffiti

I scribbled on a sample of high-pressure laminate (hpl) with pen, crayons, lipstick, and markers. A portion of the sign had been spray painted as well. Using the products recommended, all of the surface graffiti was removed. The marker and spray paint required a bit of “elbow grease”, but came off without damaging the finish.



*Spray paint can be removed with the proper product and some “elbow grease”.*

#### Disfigurement

Next I attempted to disfigure the sign with sandpaper, keys, razor blades, rocks and a hammer. The hpl sample was pretty resistant. The key inflicted the most visible damage.

*(Continued next page)*



*Keys made more visible marks than did sandpaper or razor blades.*



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### **Burning**

Holding a cigarette lighter for several seconds to the hpl left a dark residue that cleaned off. After 30 seconds of flame, however, the hpl surface developed a brown tint. It didn't come off, but was transparent.

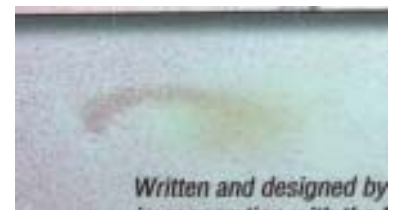
### **Breakage**

A strong blow with a heavy object (a hammer in this case) created a "ding" on the surface, but didn't break through the laminate.

The bad news is that there is no vandal-PROOF material out there. The good news is that several of the sign materials proved to be vandal-RESISTANT and in the case of graffiti could be removed with the manufacturer-recommended treatment.

For a summary of the Vandalism session including a Vandal-resistance Score Sheet visit:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/schmeeckle/Interp/Workshops/Vandalism/>



*A direct flame for 30 seconds discolored the panel.*



*A heavy blow with a hammer left a ding, but did not break the sign.*