Bradley’s Seven Principles of Roving Interpretation

Roving interpretation is personalized, face-to-face communication where the audience has chosen the venue, the resource is the stage, and the audience is the catalyst for knowledge.

As stated by the NPS, “The visitor is sovereign.” The statement should be true of all informal interpretation, roving included. The visitor dictates the length, depth, quality, and content of the contact. Once their needs are satisfied, they will be on their way, and this contact will add to an overall positive experience at your park.

1. **Roving interpretation is organized and planned in advance.**
   a. While it may seem spontaneous, roving interpretation is actually organized and planned well in advance by the good interpreter.
   b. Good Roving may seem extemporaneous, impromptu, unstructured, ad-lib, or unprepared, but this is not the case. Roving interpretation, when done properly, is well organized and planned. One should plan for location, visitor potential needs, and any props you may need.
   c. Roving provides the perfect opportunity to capitalize on interpretive opportunities, special occurrences, or seasonal events as they occur in the park.
      i. What are some examples of seasonal events in TX State Parks?
   d. Once you have determined the physical location, who your target audience is, and what it is you want to accomplish, you must identify what props/interpretive items you’ll need to pack.
      i. Consider an all-purpose bag with items for general use, and supplement it with more specific items, depending on the chosen topic and location.
      ii. What would be some items you’d include in your bag for general use?
         What would you add for roving near a small creek?

2. **Roving should be scheduled.**
   a. Scheduling roving interpretation ensures you’ll make the time for it and gives added emphasis that you’ll spend one-on-one time with the visitor. *(Informal interpretation presents the opportunity for contact with a much higher percentage of your visitors and more personal and positive visibility for ranger presence.)*
   b. When planning for roving interpretation, it’s important to think of the “what” and the “who,” but it’s also important to plan for the “when.” By having a dedicated time to do roving interpretation, you are more likely to actually venture out and do it. This ensures you leave sufficient time to make meaningful contacts, without you or the visitor feeling rushed. *Schedule during peak times for maximum contact and exposure.*

3. **The benefits of roving interpretation extend beyond the visitor.**
   a. Roving interpretation benefits not only the visitor, but the resource and the interpreter (and your organization) benefit as well.

*Inspired by Freeman Tilden’s 6 Principles of Interpretation, and adapted from California State Parks’ module on Roving Interpretation.*
b. **Visitor Benefits:** When you station yourself in locations where potential hazards exist, not only can you make roving effective as an interpretive tool, but you can also address safety concerns.

c. **Resource Benefits:** This follows along with the Authority of the Resource Technique. Our visitors must adhere to so many rules and regulations. These rules can become instruments of mistrust and elitism if not explained and personalized by the interpreter. It is easier to gain compliance with understanding than with enforcement.
   
   i. What are some commonly broken rules we can use understanding to try and gain compliance with?

d. **Public Relations Benefits:** Roving can be pure joy for the interpreter. It’s a chance for them to meander through the park, while enjoying the resource and mingling with the visitors. It provides an opportunity for the visitors to chat with the one person they view as being the most knowledgeable about the site.

e. **Valuable Knowledge Benefits:** While the people you interact with during your roving may not be the same people who attend your interpretive programs, they still offer insight into the wants and needs of your visitors. The knowledge gained through these interactions can be used to improve program delivery, as well as other park services.

f. **Action item:** Think about benefits for the resource, management, and the visitor. How could you expand upon benefits in those areas as starting points for thought?)

g. What are some other benefits you can think of?

4. **Roving interpretation reaches new audiences.**

a. Many visitors who never attend formal programs are very welcoming to these types of personalized, discovery opportunities.

b. Roving through campgrounds, trails and day use areas is the perfect way to personally invite visitors to programs. This also allows you to gain valuable insights about your visitors, and potential program audience.
   
   i. What are some inferences you may be able to make?

c. Only approximately 20% of the visiting public attends programs. Roving interpretation allows you to reach the remaining 80 or so percent of visitors that may never attend a program. That being said, the more welcome a visitor feels, the more likely they are to attend a program. By doing roving interpretation, you may be able to connect with visitors you normally wouldn’t be able to, and encourage them to attend programs.

5. **The more you know the location, the better the discoveries.**

a. An in-depth knowledge of the planned location helps the visitor to make discoveries about your site.

b. There’s a big difference in being familiar with a site and really knowing it. The more you visit a location, the more your senses will begin to open to all the
details. Think of all the discoveries you make each time you return to this location. Translate this knowledge of your location by helping the visitor make these and similar discoveries.

i. What are some potential roving locations at your site?

c. Look at each location from different perspectives; management, interpreter, parent, child, etc.

6. Plan for the less-obvious curiosities of the visitor.
   a. It is the less-obvious curiosities that the visitor has that are the most important to plan for.
   b. Experience is typically a good teacher when it comes to anticipating visitor needs and interests. Some aspects of a location, ex: the rock at Enchanted Rock, will always be of interest to every visitor.
   c. However, it is the less-obvious curiosities that the visitor has that are the most important to plan for. Build on each interaction, and use that to predict what you will be asked.
   d. Remember: no matter how many times you’ve heard a question, this is the visitor’s first time asking it. Answer it as if it’s the first time you’ve heard it; be sincere. You’ve selected this location because it attracts visitors; ask yourself what it is that brings them to this site.

7. Continually assess your audience
   a. Be observant so that you can customize the interaction to the individual.
   b. When approaching the visitor, be observant. Some visitors will want to enjoy the experience, without being interrupted, even if the distraction was well-meant.
   c. With every contact, try to personalize your approach. Look for little things; read the clues of the person and the situation.
      i. Do not forget to keep an eye out for any signs that the contact should end
      ii. What are some warning signals – when to leave??
   d. Disengaging with a visitor – How do you end a contact when the visitor wants you to stay forever?? It’s important to use tactful persuasion and skill. Try to remind them that you have many other visitors to serve, and only a short time to do so. Direct them to a trail or other nearby feature they may enjoy, and be sure to thank them for their attention and interest.
      i. What are some methods you use to disengage?
Brainstorming – Roving

Answer each question in respect to your park. Some research may be necessary to fully answer these questions.

Park Name __________________________________________________________

1. What areas in at your site are prime for conducting roving interpretation?

2. Are there any special events or seasonal opportunities that occur at your site where roving would be beneficial?

3. In terms of resource protection or visitor safety, which on-site locations would benefit the most from an on-site roving presence?

4. Using the information above, come up with a potential topic as well as a few items to include in your kit bag.