

STUDENT PAPER NO. 2

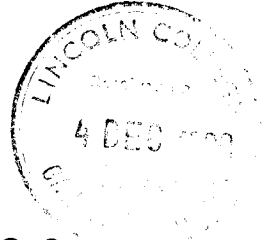
INTERPRETATION
OF
HISTORY



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**INTERPRETATION
OF
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Compiled and Edited

by

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PREFACE

This paper discusses the interpretation of history. It covers the understanding of history; why we would wish to interpret it; how to approach the task of interpreting history and what methods are available. The bulk of the paper comprises edited excerpts from an undergraduate diploma dissertation:

White, A. 1985. "Guidelines for Interpreting History".

This work is the basis for this paper since it provides a comprehensive overview of the topic. Material from two other dissertations is also used to provide specific examples of historic interpretation complementary to the work of White (1985). These dissertations are:

Gardiner, J. 1983. "Ruapekapeka Pa Historic Reserve: Management Plan Proposal".

Francis, D. 1986. "Cost-Benefit Analysis and Interpretation Planning for Historic Resources - Using the Tautuku Trails Tractor as a Case Study"

All material in this paper is based upon White (1985), unless otherwise indicated by author 'initials'¹ before and after the material concerned. All references are included in Appendix One as a composite bibliographic list, along with a list of suggested readings.

1 Gardiner, J. (1983) = [JG]; Francis, D. (1986) = [DF]

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1. INTRODUCTION

Without a doubt, New Zealanders have become increasingly interested in their cultural heritage over the past ten years. Perhaps the pace at which the quality of our life is decreasing is a contributing factor towards this. In our often artificial and 'processed' world, the term 'old fashioned' with its associated connotations of wholesomeness will now sell bread.

There was an era when goods, processes and ways of life associated with times past were often scorned as being obsolete. Society in general could not wait to toss the 'old' away in favour of obtaining a 'new improved' quality of life. Consequently, our lives have become increasingly empty of functions that were common in the past, for example, the healthy exercise and satisfaction of chopping wood for fires, for warmth and cooking, is denied to many today. Much of our lives has become 'softer' physically, but more stressful mentally. Perhaps it is, that by looking to history, people are seeking to find a balance in their lives.

But whatever people's motives are for exploring the avenues of history, it can be a fascinating and valuable past-time. To open these avenues and to share them with others is not only challenging, but also an important function to our society.

The monumental approach: glittering brass plaques set in concrete or a string of facts and figures, has probably never been a very successful method of preserving history. If we desire to see people (not just a select few) take an interest in history and benefit from it, it must be presented in such a way as to make it 'live'. History should not consist of a dead past, but rather be meaningful and living in the minds of present generations.

2. UNDERSTANDING HISTORY

"It is vain to imagine we can totally recreate the past. We can only give pieces of the past whose remnants have survived to the present."

(Sherfy, 1977)

2.1 What is History?

An understanding of the complex nature of history is important for those who are involved in researching, writing, and presenting history in a variety of forms, for great is the responsibility of those who deal in history.

Can history be defined as being the record of what one age finds worthy of note in another? If so, how do we qualify this statement? June Goodfield (1977) helps to answer this by providing a definition that embodies the essence of history in its fullest sense:

"History is the study of the human past as a form of collective self understanding of human beings and their world. It is the story of human activities, what men did, what they thought, what they suffered, what they aimed at, what they accepted, what they rejected or conceived or imagined. It tells us about their motives, their purposes, their ambitions, their ways of acting and their ways of creating."

(Goodfield, 1977)

Is history, therefore, a collection of significant facts from the past, which we can implicitly rely upon to paint the true story of humanity? While facts are the raw material of history and are thus vital, so is someone who will select them and use them to paint the story of the people and events of the past. Therein lies the role of the interpreter.

2.2 The Selection of Historical Facts

"It has never occurred to me to enquire by what accident or process of attrition that the minute selection of facts, out of all the myriad of facts that must have once been known to somebody, had survived to become the facts of history."

(Carr, 1961)

Maureen Smith collecting the mail from the Chateau on the morning of 24 April 1984, is just as much a fact of the past as the fact that Chief Te Heuheu Tukino IV officially gifted Tongariro National park to the people of New Zealand on 23 September 1887. Obviously there are significant facts which stand out like beacons, but there are also many less significant facts. These often serve as the flesh and blood of a story whose preservation often relies upon the perspective, interpretation, or whim of the historian.

E.H.Carr (1961) believes that:

"the facts of the past are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend partly on chance, but mainly on which part of the ocean he chooses to fish and what tackle he chooses to use. These two factors being, of course, determined by the kind of fish he wants to catch."

(Carr, 1961)

It is often, therefore, the recorder or historian who rescues key facts of the past from becoming drowned or lost in the ocean of historical information. The effectiveness of such a subjective role depends ultimately upon the honesty and professionalism of the historian.

2.3 Historical Honesty

"History is just myth making or an agreed upon fable."

Napoleon's harsh words become true when the utmost care is not taken when recording, collecting and interpreting history. Good historical interpretation does not glamorise or indulge in hero worship at the expense of truth. It tells the story as it was without indulging in fantasy or creating events that never happened.

The historian,¹ is by necessity, selective of facts, but they only speak when called on to speak. Thus facts are given the floor, but in a certain order and context. We must be on our guard against manipulating the past, remembering that one of the most effective ways to influence opinion is by the selection and arrangement of appropriate facts which can result in turning history into a form of propaganda.

Historical dishonesty (for whatever reasons) creates an artificial, unreal, false foundation upon which our history is built. It is necessary to tell the truth, not to be judgemental, but merely honest. Marcella Sherfy said that interpreting history means listening to the people of the past and then repeating (not twisting, culling or exaggerating) their words and thoughts. Oliver Cromwell made a similar point by sternly advising his artist to paint him 'warts and all'.

A myth that is in danger of being created at Tongariro National Park is the story of Chief Te Heuheu and the original gifting of the park. The current story being promoted portrays Te Heuheu as a noble man of great foresight, wisdom and generosity. Undoubtedly the gift was a generous gesture from which many have benefited, but one does not need to go far to find different versions of this story. One of these accounts related by one of his own descendants today is as follows: Te Heuheu was advised by his son-in-law, Lawrence Grace (in Parliament at the time), that it would be advisable to gift the mountains to the government to be made a national park before they were taken, if he wanted to clear his name with the government after his involvement with Te Kooti (seen as a Maori rebel).

History is simply the story of all people ranging from those who distinguish themselves to the ordinary person. The fact is that:

"history, like life, is complex, contradictory and ambiguous. There are few genuine heroes or villains in real life, merely people who are sometimes heroic, sometimes villainous, but most of the time, simply human".

(Utley, 1976)

1. The word 'historian' is used here to refer to people trained and untrained who are involved in researching, documenting and interpreting history.

We cannot always assume modern values and meanings to be similar to those of the past. An injustice of the past may not necessarily spring from evil motives, but rather from a set of values and assumptions that were plausible in their time and place. Understanding this will help us avoid making judgements that transform our forebears into grotesque caricatures of the people they were. For example, Maoris were once caned in school for speaking in their native tongue, indeed a horrifying action to take in light of today's view of the Maori language. But perhaps teachers then saw it as being lazy, lapsing into a native tongue, and considered it was in the children's best interests to discipline them.

Guidelines for historical honesty outlined by Sherfy (1977) were as follows, we:

1. ...have no right to assume that people of the past felt as we do about similar experiences or ideas;
2. ...cannot ever imbue previous generations with our own political principles or values;
3. ...cannot misleadingly 'select' the facts we present to make the point that we would like to make; and
4. ...dare not allow ourselves to think or tell others that we are portraying the past, when, in fact, we simply demonstrate some few physical activities or objects of a previous generation.

Historians need an imaginative understanding of the minds of people from the past and of the thoughts behind their acts. In fact, historians really need to enter the shoes or skins of the people they have met, if only through such means as a picture, movie or description. Some kind of contact, understanding or identification with the minds of those they are dealing with needs to be made.

2.4 A Responsibility of Evaluation

How then do we determine which facts and aspects of history to select and preserve? How do we qualify Goodfield's assertion that history is what one age finds worthy of note in another? Croce stated (in Carr 1961):

"All history is contemporary history; it consists essentially in seeing the past through the eyes of the present and in the light of its problems, and that the main work of the historian is not to record, but to evaluate, for if he does not evaluate, how can he know what is worth recording."

Is it then, our responsibility to evaluate what aspects of the past we should select to preserve and interpret? For we must be careful to ensure that what we select and how we interpret it will be worthwhile and beneficial to the people of today and tomorrow. An understanding of the nature of history; what some of the values of history are, and a knowledge of the need for a representative history will assist in providing a criteria for the evaluation and selection of our history for preservation and interpretation.

2.5 The Value of History

When history is accurate, honest and interesting, nothing is further from the truth than Henry Ford's blunt statement "History is bunk".

2.5.1 Understanding the present

Understanding the present is assisted greatly by an understanding of the past. The past enables us to understand more of how we came to be what we are, and where we are today.

We cannot expect to understand a contemporary situation or phenomena without knowing at least something of how it came to be what it is today. For example, in order for us to understand agriculture in New Zealand today, as it differs from European or British agriculture, a knowledge of what has occurred in the past (e.g. early settlers' lack of understanding for our land types has given rise to serious erosion problems) explains to us why and how things have evolved to give us the current situation.

2.5.2 The past as a teacher for the present and future

The gorse bush which was introduced into New Zealand by early English settlers for stock fences, thriving under new conditions, soon spread out of control. Many other plants and animals that have been introduced with little understanding of potential consequences have taught us a hard lesson. We now know that many trials and tests must be made before any further introduction, however beneficial it may first appear. Recently, probably a very wise decision was made to reject a proposal to farm mink in New Zealand on the grounds that they would inevitably escape and add to our predator problem.

History teaches us that the past, present and future are interdependent. We should not naively imagine they are all separate and live in only one or two dimensions of time. In areas of social justice, history can serve as a means of causing people to determine to change and to attempt to right some of the wrongs of the past. When researching for the Tokaanu project, a 92 year old Maori lady told of how she and other children when playing naked amongst the raupo catching small fish, would lie down and try to hide when the coach from Waiouru came past. Just their bare buttocks would be showing and she said she could see the sneers and looks of disdain on the people's faces. Immediately within me there was roused the determination to dignify this lady with the respect due to any human being and, if possible, heal some of the hurts. History can, therefore, enable us to understand society of the past and in so doing increase our mastery over the society of the present.

2.5.3 A sense of belonging

History helps by giving a sense of belonging and continuity, a feeling of being at home in one's own country and time. This is not altered because relatively new countries like New Zealand and Australia, are not as deeply rooted in the human past as places like Britain. (The Australian Aborigines with their 40,000 year history would be surprised to hear that!!)

It also helps by providing a common background and foundation. Thus history can act as a social cement binding societies together. The oral history tradition of the Maori people must have, and still does, help bind a tribe together.

2.5.4 The fascination of history

"History thrills them with examples and makes them partakers of things and times which are past."

(Gassondi, in Tilden 1957:68)

The age we live in with its mass of technological labour saving gadgets makes us gasp in astonishment at pioneering practices, feats and hardships. Camping out with just a blanket apiece was not uncommon for early explorers to the Mt Ruapehu region. Today we probably would not consider camping out without an Everest sleeping bag and cover. History is full of drama and adventure, people are naturally interested in what has happened before their time and this spontaneous curiosity should not be allowed to wither.

2.6 Keeping the Past in Perspective

A preoccupation with the past must be balanced with a concern with living as a person in the present, and with a vision or concern for the future. It can be easy to slip into the world of the past and to lose touch with reality, for to love the past obsessively may be an expression of nostalgic romanticism, a symptom of loss in faith and interest in the present and future. Care must be taken not to allow ourselves to become engulfed by the past, we must keep our heads above water if the work we produce is to be of any benefit to others. For the people of the present belong to the present, not to the past. We live in the fresh and bright light of today.

2.7 New Zealand's Historical Resource

We do not have castles or old Roman roads and we cannot talk about kings who reigned thousands of years ago. On the surface, New Zealand looks historically threadbare in comparison with other countries, with only a little over 150 years of recorded history. But that is only on the face of it!

Arriving in this land circa 1000 years ago the Maori people set about creating a new life in an often inhospitable and harsh environment that had, for example, little to offer in the way of natural food resources. They have bequeathed to us a fascinating culture, much of which is well illustrated in physical forms such as pa sites, redoubts, tools and instruments, while their social customs are well documented and can still be accurately recalled by surviving old folk.

The appearance of the first of the restless enterprising European immigrants in 1820 on the scene, marked the beginning of a period that would create a history incredibly intense and colourful. Seeking to carve a new life out of a rugged environment they set out with a vengeance to make a 'New England' and as most human beings are wont to do, to build upon that by making life more comfortable and familiar.

From being a predominantly bush covered land New Zealand has probably undergone one of the most rapid face changes any country in the world has known. So much has happened in such a short span of time. Events that may have occurred in 100 years in New Zealand have taken perhaps 1000 years to occur in well established civilisations. For example, the clash between two cultures, Maori and European, existed for an intense but relatively short period, producing the assimilation for one society into another (even if still not total) in perhaps a world record time.

The gold rush era, the milling industry, the establishment of the railway, saw towns spring up overnight and often disappear just as quickly. The stories behind these events reveal

amazing and fascinating insights into the characters and pioneering spirits of our forebears. The history of the establishment of the North Island Main Trunk Line around the volcanic plateau area provides testimonies to their fortitude:

"The men who lived and worked on these projects had to endure the most spartan conditions, comparable more with those of mountaineers or arctic explorers, than of gangers or metalworkers. Isolated from society and its services, they had to develop an inner strength in order to survive. The few womenfolk who accompanied them showed even greater fortitude. As the successive townships developed out of the bush around the turn of the century, tents with clay or corrugated iron chimneys appeared and there the home making skills of the bachelor or frontier housewife were put to the test."

(Anon, 1984)²

Perhaps one of the most valuable assets that arises in having such a short history is that there are people alive today who are able to recount much of our history. (A resource which should be tapped before it is too late!) Many are enthusiastic to offer assistance once they are aware of another interest (as shown in Appendix Six).

Although New Zealand does not have the length of history comparable to other countries, it is a unique history in its fullest and richest form. It remains a matter of educating people by way of collecting, preserving and interpreting our history so that it may be appreciated and its value recognised.

2.8 A Representative New Zealand History

When evaluating and selecting specific aspects of history for interpretation and preservation it is important to consider their significance, for we need to be aware of the importance of preserving as complete a record of New Zealand's historical heritage as is possible. We should not be so occupied with preserving old houses just because we are fond of them, while important battle sites or oral history sources that may be able to provide jigsaw pieces

2. Article in the Journal of Tongariro National Park, No. 18, 1984. "The Challenge of the Mountains."

in our national history, are being neglected.

Although New Zealand has a number of organisations, both private and public, involved in preserving our history there is not a concerted effort presently being made to ensure a representative history is being preserved. Some organisations are beginning to touch on and recognise the need to do this, but on the whole there has been a piecemeal approach with individuals and organisations 'doing their own thing'. Frequently there is little regard given as to how significant a particular aspect of history is on a regional and national basis. The reality exists that while there is no planned, co-ordinated strategy, the chances of being able to compile a more complete picture of the nation's history are being lessened. If we are not careful we will be inheritors of an unbalanced and biased history.

What can be done to solve this problem? Firstly, the most important step is to be aware of the problem and the need to consider the significance and representativeness of a specific historic interpretation or preservation before leaping blindly into it. Secondly, we can probably learn much from an exercise the United States National Park Service undertook. In 1972 they completed a comprehensive planning study in which the two main objectives were to:

1. ...define a national park system that is balanced and complete in its representativeness of the national historical heritage;
2. ...to identify gaps that presently exist in this.

To bring this about they tackled the daunting, often subjective task of organising American history into nine themes such as: the Original Inhabitants, European Exploration and Settlement, Society and Social Conscience. Within these major themes 40 sub-themes were identified; the sub-themes were then further broken down into 281 major facets. On completion of this task, each historic area and site was carefully evaluated and assigned to a theme, sub-theme and major facet. From here, the representativeness of the overall preservation effort could be assessed and any gaps identified.

It is interesting to note that individuals such as Josephine Breese, Assistant Director of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, are thinking along similar lines. The following is an extract from an article she independently wrote for the Agmaz Journal³

"The inherent bias of historic preservation has been towards the grand and unique and the Trust property holdings to some extent exhibit this bias. However, as a custodian of national cultural property, the Trust has to go further. It has a responsibility to identify representative examples of New Zealand's history and where possible ensure their protection. To develop representative historic preservation, it will require an attempt at defining themes of New Zealand's history. Such an exercise will be equally fraught with problems of bias but by acknowledging the problem, and attempting to solve it, the achievement would be a great step forward in historic preservation.

Once a series of themes are established the historic resource would need to be identified and then measured for representativeness against these themes. Identification and measurement would include the resource that is already protected and that identified but not protected. This process would highlight these aspects of our history represented in our protection system and would also highlight the gaps in our present system. Once gathered, this body of information would enable a representative historic resource to be identified and ultimately protected."⁴

And in a 1985 progress report for the Trust, she wrote:

"The trust is a major property owner and administrator. There have been several major phases of property acquisition and development.

- 1960's and early 1970's: This period was marked by a concentration on Northland mission properties, as representing one of the early areas of European settlement. Major properties acquired were Waimate North (1960), Pompallier House (1967), Mangungu Mission House (1972) and Kemp House (1973).

- 1970's: A period of concentration on house museums in the Auckland area. Properties acquired were Ewelme Cottage (1970), Alberton (1973) and Highwic (1979).

- mid 1970's - early 1980's: A deliberate policy was followed of developing properties representing New Zealand's industrial, transport and farming history. Properties

3. Date of this journal unknown.

4. Date of this journal unknown.

acquired were Lyttelton Timeball Station (1973), Hayes Engineering Works (1974), Matanaka Farm Buildings (1976), Clark's Flourmill (1977), Brunner Industrial Site (1978), and Totara Estate (1981).

These phases represent of course, only part of the story. The Trust acquired other properties on their individual merits, often in the face of threats to their preservation rather than to preserve and present a systematic sample of New Zealand history. This rather ad hoc approach has meant that Trust properties do not reflect an overall scheme but certain remnant fragments of our history. Where does the Trust present examples of working class history?"

Picking up on Josephine's last statement, it is interesting to note Murray Thacker's comment that New Zealanders do not have sufficient pride in their history yet. When establishing the Okains Bay Museum he discovered that often people were reluctant to acknowledge the importance of, and dwell on the aspects of history such as early pioneer life and associated conditions, for example, the use of clay floors in cottages. He believed they preferred to dwell on the much grander aspects of their history, missing the importance of telling how it really was and the fascinating story surrounding this.

Hopefully we are leaving this type of mentality behind. In fact, it is encouraging to see many seemingly 'off-beat' aspects of our history, for example the history of the Plunket Society, increasingly receiving the attention they deserve, for these 'minor' aspects of our history help to make up a complete picture.

The New Zealand Forest Service, particularly as regards their Westland Conservancy was very active in preserving and interpreting history. Ray Hooker, an archaeologist, hired as a fulltime historian, produced many detailed records and site descriptions of historic sites within this conservancy. Paul Mahoney,⁵ their sawmilling historian, completed countless oral records, building up an in-depth account of this particular aspect of history. In 1981 the

5. Note the Historic Resource Management Procedure he developed is shown in Appendix Three.

implementation of a management plan prepared by Bruce Watson saw the emphasis begin on opening up old historic tracks. These were seen as being the key to recreational development, linking areas of great historic interest and natural beauty. The Croesus and Moonlight walks, Greenstone Valley and Moonlight Valley being some of them.

The Department of Lands and Survey, active under the National Parks and Reserves section and the Walkways Commission, had also been responsible throughout the country for interpreting and preserving many aspects of our history. The Otago Goldfields Park and the Bay of Islands Historic and Maritime Park, Ross Historic Goldfields Walkway, Pipiriki Colonial House (visitor centre for the Wanganui River Reserves), are just some examples of this effort. The Department recognised the need for a representative history (even if it does not always act on it). This recognition is illustrated under Section Two of the Reserves Act 1977, No. 3, 'General Policy for Historic Reserves in New Zealand':

"The Need for a Comprehensive and Balanced Historic Reserve Programme

The establishment of historic reserves over the years under the former Reserves and Domains Act 1953 (and earlier enactments) has not been as comprehensive and balanced as would now seem desirable. For example, it is probable that emphasis was placed on the reservation of pa sites (often in remote localities or without adequate public access) because of a lack of alternative conservation measures. Control of adverse uses was, however, arranged for archaeological sites through an amendment to the Historic Places Act in 1975.

It may also be possible to achieve a better geographic balance than at present and to give proper coverage to all important New Zealand themes such as the society of the pre-European inhabitants, European exploration and settlement, Maori-European wars, and political, social, and technological affairs. An inventory of all aspects of historic reserves will help in assessing how suitable different reserves are to illustrate various themes. This will assist in identifying themes that are not sufficiently represented in the present historic places systems."

However, despite the efforts of the previously mentioned organisations and the many others who have not been mentioned, there still remains a lack of a co-ordinated, planned approach, to ensure that these efforts are all heading towards preserving a representative

New Zealand history. Often individual organisations are too close to their specific historic subjects. They need to have them brought into perspective as regards their national and regional significance and knit them into the broader picture.

3. INTERPRETATION AND HISTORY

"If it does not interest universal man something radically deeper is demanded. This something is an art form, an analogy, a parable, a picture, a metaphor - something that brings things down and incarnates them. This art form for our purpose takes the shape of interpretation."

(Tilden, 1957:24)

Interpretation is an art form that has existed in some degree or another for thousands of year. The sense of the word used for this dissertation, originated in the United States where it developed into a specialised skill among national park rangers interpreting natural and historical landscapes. It is only in relatively recent years that interpretation, particularly in parks, has really been practised in New Zealand.

3.1 Interpretation - Definitions, Aims and Goals¹

Ko Tongariro te Maunga;
Ko Taupo te Moana;
Ko Te Heuheu te Tangata.

Interpretation generally implies translating from one language to another and, although not strictly applicable in this case, the 'language' of the mountains, forests, rivers and historic sites needs to be interpreted so they can speak their history.

"Every plant, landform, and artifact has a story that waits to be told, yet not all people can read their subtle codes - they are messages which require interpretation."

(Bamford and Mounsey, 1984: 18.)

Interpretation is the link between the visitor and the resource (in the case of an historic resource it may be embodied in an artifact, site or event). The more a visitor is able to

1. Refer to previous paper in this series for further discussion of interpretation.

understand about a particular resource the more they are able to appreciate and enjoy it. Interpretation aims at giving people new understanding, new insights and new enthusiasms. In essence good interpretation reaches out and touches the daily life and experience of the visitor.

"If, for example, the object of contemplation is historical, then interpretation aims to make people think 'These people were just like I am'. If I were in their place, under similar conditions my response to the question of getting by might have been no different from theirs."

(Bamford and Mounsey, 1984: 20.)

A particular school of thought believes that for interpretation to take place it is necessary to have a first hand involvement with an object, artifact, landscape or site. Unfortunately, particularly in the case of historical interpretation, first hand encounters are not always practical or possible. This does not mean effective interpretation still cannot take place. We cannot 'see' history, it has been and gone. Sometimes we are given evidence which helps us piece it together. But I believe history involves much imagination and a re-creation in our minds which does not and cannot always rely on a first hand experience with an object.

First hand involvement with an object, artifact, landscape or site may not only be costly, operationally unsound, dangerous to the life of the resource, but also discriminatory against people such as the handicapped, elderly and lower socio-economic groups. Sometimes it is necessary to take the 'mountain' to the people in a form of vicarious experiences.

So, why interpret history? Answers to such a question may be summarised within two major themes:

- **To Enrich People's Lives**

To assist the visitor in developing a keener awareness, appreciation and understanding of their historical heritage, consequently it is hoped that the points covered earlier in Section 2.5 (The Value of History) will be achieved.

- **To Aid Agency Understanding and Public Relations**

This role can be summarised by the often-quoted statement from the U.S. Park Service Manual - *"Through interpretation understanding, through understanding appreciation, through appreciation protection"*.

Good interpretation should encourage thoughtful use of the historical resource, teaching people that our history (which may be embodied in documents, oral sources, sites and artifacts) is priceless. People consequently become more responsible custodians of our cultural heritage assisting with, rather than hindering, its preservation.

Whether the management agent be a national park, the Historic Places Trust, or a public museum, a well done interpretive programme will favourably promote an understanding of its programmes and image. Not only is it the responsibility of an agency which relies on public funds to maintain good public relations by producing good 'goods', but it is also in their interest to have the support of the public for ease of carrying out their overall aims.

3.2 Principles of Interpreting History

In the past, history was often viewed as a boring, 'dead' subject, however, today the scope of history has changed; it is no longer just past politics or important dates and events, but includes the ordinary person as well as the famous. Local history is seen as important in presenting a fuller national history, for the past does not occur in a vacuum; it is not just a series of events and dates, rather, it is the story of human lives concerning all issues.

Tilden (1957), said the past must be kept a 'living reality'; the people of the past must be made to have 'flesh on their bones and blood in their veins'. History is meaningless to people unless it gives them a feeling of reality, they must be able to make contact with the people of the past. An old ruin should not remain as such, but through effective interpretation it should be made into a house of living people. This may be made into a

physical reality in the case of a 'living history' (see Section 5.1.4), or it may be that the people of the past are alive again in the minds of the people of the present.

People have a very strong urge to associate themselves with the historic past. They are curious about how people of an earlier era lived, what they ate, what they did for entertainment, etc. How, in short, the lives of these people compare with the lifestyles of today.

Because of this natural interest man has in himself, it often makes interpreting history an easier task than interpreting nature, although more interpretation is often required for history. At first glance a Maori redoubt may be meaningless to some without any interpretation, whereas a river or mountain can provide an aesthetic self interpretation. So, how is history brought to life? How is an historic site re-peopled, a past event or situation relived again?

An understanding of some of Tilden's principles of interpretation is a good place to start in answering this question. Tilden is considered a father of the art of interpretation. His principles, although since added to and enlarged upon, remain the basic foundations upon which all good interpretation, both historical and environmental may be built. The following six sections discuss historical interpretation based upon Tilden's six principles.

3.2.1 The visitor's first interest

The visitor's chief interest is in something that affects them. Tilden, 1957, said that "*An interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described, to something within the personality or experience of the visitor, will be sterile*". Therefore, it is essential for the interpreter to mentally put him/herself in the visitor's shoes, and not assume that the visitor has a previous knowledge and interest in the subject.

However, it is safe to assume that there is *"no age or state of society or mode of action in history to which there is not something corresponding in the visitor's life"* (Emerson, in Tilden 1957:17). Human nature and basic needs have not really changed in the course of time. As a consequence the interpretation of something like the 'Maori life in a thermal area' is comparatively easy. It has all the basic ingredients that allow it to be directly related to the life and experiences of the visitor. Thermal areas made life more comfortable for the Maori people; on their doorstep they had a natural oven, bath, laundry, a means of central heating, curing their illnesses and a place for warmth, relaxation and fun. Because all these functions of daily life have been paralleled with familiar objects or activities in the life of the visitor, it is possible for them to understand and identify with Maori life in a thermal area.

As discussed previously, the opportunity always arises to provoke the mind of the visitor through the question, "What would I have done under similar circumstances?". The Maori people living in an often harsh environment without the modern conveniences of today were quick to take advantage of the comforts a thermal area offered. Today the average person would probably respond in the same manner if faced with similar circumstances. It is easy to imagine sliding into warm water in order to keep the cold at bay when the comfort of an electric heater was not available.

The interpretation needs to reach out and enter into the visitor's life by creating a response that involves our emotions. For example, rather than using a label 'a scrubbing board used pre 1945' the Turangi Information Centre simply labelled a scrubbing board 'Grandma's washing machine'.

Another example is provided by the museum exhibit of 1900's maternity clothes which was labelled with the following statement: *"If you were pregnant 100 years ago these are the clothes you would have worn"*. Interpretations such as these are directly related to the visitor's life and cannot help but create an involvement and emotional response. In this way the use of history can be personalised.

3.2.2 Interpretation is revelation based on information

"Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based on information; they are entirely different things, however, all interpretation includes information."

(Tilden, 1957:18)

Information is vital, but as stated by Sir Walter Scott, whether *"a great battle is won or lost makes little impression on our minds; often our imaginations and attention are excited by a detailed description of a much more trifling event. This must be because we prefer a knowledge of mankind to only an acquaintance with their actions"* (in Tilden 1957:18). If we are given a knowledge of the people of the past, how they felt, how they acted and what they experienced, they become real people, not just words or names.

For example, the Armed Constabulary were based at Tokaanu in 1869 while waiting for an appropriate time to defeat and capture Te Kooti. The following account tells us a little more than the bare facts and dates. It tells us what the conditions were like at the time and gives a glimpse of their life while at Tokaanu. Does this not make the 'Armed Constabulary' into a group of real men?

"The weather was bitterly cold at this time, and the men, not overburdened with blankets, suffered exceedingly, and would have done so much more but for the magnificent hot springs that surrounded them on all sides. Two thirds of the force were generally to be found in the large circular spring, sitting with the water up to their chins, discussing the topics of the day. In fact, it was a sort of clubroom for the men, but a very dangerous one, for at this time the largest of the boiling springs, distant scarcely 20 yards from their bathing place, was in a state of great irritation, and about twice a week would blow up with very little warning, throwing a column of boiling water 100 feet high."

(Gudgeon, 1887)

People who do not personally have a knowledge of, or who do not closely know someone associated or involved with a war, event of period of history, will possibly not be interested in the factual information such as the military details. Rather they will be interested in the great human story. As part of this the visitor needs to be able to sense the issues and crises

that led to a particular event, the choices that were available, the decisions that had to be made, etc.² It might appear that this kind of approach only scantily furnishes the details such as the place, position, number, dates, etc. But history and its interpretation is the study of life, not of still life.

3.2.3 The story's the thing

The fastest way to involve and absorb people is to tell them a story, while a recital of facts and figures, or an inventory of details is probably the fastest way to lose them. If the raw material is taken and woven into a story, form and life will be given to it. An example of this approach from the Tongariro National Park Summer Nature programme was an evening talk entitled 'Under the Earth'. The basic objective of the talk was to describe what is happening directly under our feet, starting with the soil layers we stand on and finishing with the continental plates and magma hundreds of kilometres beneath us. A 'professor' equipped with appropriate gear and a radio, embarked on a 'Journey to the Centre of the Earth'. Remaining in radio contact he was periodically contacted by the ranger giving the talk and asked for reports on his discoveries and experiences. The ranger would then explain to the audience just what it was that the professor had seen.

Through the professor's experiences and reports the audience became totally involved in the 'story' and was taken on a journey to the centre of the earth learning about what is happening under the earth on the way.

Historical material usually lends itself to a story form more readily than a subject relating to the environment (as it is essentially about the story of human life). It remains a matter of selecting the appropriate material to tell this story.

2. Appendix Two contains a valid example of such an approach from Gardiner (1983).

Another of the evening talks, entitled 'Stories of the Past', involved staff dressing up and re-enacting stories such as the Haunted Whare, sheep farming and early skiing incidents. This enabled the audience to catch a glimpse of and understand some of the early human activities in Tongariro National Park.

And rather than stating the bald fact that the Taumata Puhipuhi geyser at Tokaanu erupted faithfully every 30 minutes, the small story about the Maori children dancing daringly over its vent seconds before it was due to erupt speaks of its faithfulness, and consequently probably will not be forgotten by the visitor.

Story telling is fundamental to interpretation and in many ways is a form of entertainment. Care must be taken to ensure that it remains the highest form of entertainment, a form which while entertaining, provides new understandings, insights and enthusiasms.

3.2.4 Not instruction by provocation

A recital of facts and details in an attempt to stuff as much knowledge as possible into the visitor's head or to try and satisfy your own vanity is a waste of time. Just enough material should be given to excite the interest and create a desire to probe for more. Too complete an account, or re-creation of the scene can rob the visitor of the feeling of discovery and accomplishment. It is always good to know when sufficient material has been provided and to be content to stop there. Perhaps just a short statement or quote may be enough to tantalise and spark an interest. Tilden said never give the 'nail the last tap'.

Presenting history in a provocative manner suits its nature admirably. So much of history relies on imaginative, inquisitive minds, re-creating and probing past events, actions and thoughts. Provocative interpretation should, therefore, stimulate a person's mind to re-people a scene.

"Some of the magic of history and its ability to provoke thought and learning, comes from the mystery, from the uncharted and intricate reaches of earlier thought yet to be discovered."

(Sherfy, 1977:36)

3.2.5 The wholesomeness of whole

The interpreter, whether in a publication, display, or person to person situation much always appeal to the whole person that the visitor represents. *"If you look upon him as a seeker of information upon some subject you specialise in, you are considering him in part, and that part, at the moment may want nothing of your wares."* (Tilden, 1957:45)

The whole person, amongst other things, needs their natural religious spirit, their emotions, their yearning for continuity, their love for a story and their physical pleasures ministered to as well as their intellect and understanding. It is not possible to relate to the whole person if, for example, the mechanics of old ski bindings are obsessively focused on or the construction and workings of the Hoka Downs at Tokaanu is all that is told of this historic site.

3.2.6 A separate programme for children

"Interpretation addressed to children (say up to the age of 12) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate programme."

(Tilden, 1957:47)

As a generalisation children are very much into relating to physical things and operating in a world of their senses, consequently history presented in an intangible form escapes them. However, history re-created in a physical form stimulates their imaginations and for the time being becomes a reality, particularly when they enter into and relive some specific period or aspect of history. They can do this with greater enthusiasm, and often benefit more from it than adults.

4. PREPARING FOR HISTORIC INTERPRETATION

The previous discussion has focussed attention on the need for a more organised approach to historic interpretation. This chapter outlines some of the ways in which such an improved approach may be achieved.

4.1 Defining Objectives and Themes

Clear objectives must be defined before any historic interpretation can take place. In the case of an historic site, these questions should be answered: what is the keynote of this whole place; what is the overall reason for its preservation? Preliminary research may be necessary to answer these questions.

Objectives must be stated in clear, unmistakable statements and contain clear direction, explaining what the management hopes the visitor to gain from the interpretation. For example, the objective for Panel C for the Tokaanu Displays is: to provide primarily a photographic review of man's use and cultural understanding of the thermal springs area, particularly focusing on the Maori.

If objectives are not defined the direction of the interpretation can become unclear, and when presented to visitors, leaves them confused and questioning the significance of the interpretation.

While objectives give the programme some direction, strong themes are necessary to tie the interpretive programme together. For example, the major theme for Panel C is: the Maori people used the thermal area as a part of their everyday life. This included cooking, relaxation, warmth, medicinal purposes, and a hotbed for their crops.

As mentioned later in the research section (4.3) it is often necessary to be flexible with objectives and themes, as new revelations arising from research may make it necessary to re-define them.

4.2 Visitor Characteristics

It is important to have a knowledge of the visitors for whom the interpretation is being produced. Because it is public money which is used to develop these sites and it is the public who visit these sites, it is important to know their needs and wants in relation to a site. This implies a need to answer the following questions:

1. Who is the interpretation for, i.e. who will visit the site?
2. Why will people visit the site? What benefits does it offer them?
3. What is unique about a site? Can people get the same type of benefit from another site more easily?
4. How do the local people feel about the site? What aspects of their history do they want preserved and what aspects are sensitive areas?

If the needs and wants of the public are fulfilled, the interpretation will be perceived favourably. If they are not, the interpretation will not be regarded so favourably and may even be regarded unfavourably. It therefore makes sense to identify these needs and wants. This may be no easy task, as Couchman (1984: 160) suggested, a visitor survey may need to be undertaken to find the answers to management's many questions. The needs and wants of the local people and their concerns over interpreting their ancestors' history must be considered and these should have at least as much emphasis as those of the public visiting the site.

If the general visitors to a site are families with children, then it must be realised that there are at least three distinct groups to which the interpretation must appeal. As an example, if a panel interpreting a village site deals only with the industry around which the village was based, the machinery used and the working conditions which men endured, it is only

interpreting a fraction of the history of that site. The appeal of this type of interpretation may be narrow. One approach to broadening the appeal of interpretation would be to include: pictorial representation of what children did and to have some acknowledgement of what women did in the village at that time.

Pictorial representations of children at play are easily understood by children of all ages. They can see the games children are playing, and be introduced to the idea that if they were living in this place at that time, they would have been dressed in a similar way and playing similar games. A similar argument can be put forward for women, as most historic interpretation seems to concentrate on men, unless a female has done something out of the ordinary. Historic interpretation should provide the opportunity for women to think: 'if I was living here, at that time, this is what I would probably be doing'. Again the answers to these problems are very site specific and it is difficult to generalise for people. In some cases, what types of machinery issued and what this machinery's capabilities are may be of just as much interest to women as it is to men. However, it must also be remembered that it may not be. As Mounsey and Bamford (1984: 20) stated, there is a need to touch the daily life of the visitor.

4.3 Collecting the Raw Material - Research

In order to make an historic interpretation there must be a good supply of accurate and honest information to draw from. This usually requires many hours of stalking often elusive material.¹ Thorough research lays a solid foundation for interpretation. Sketchy research on the other hand can result in inaccuracies and long lasting, costly embarrassments.

1. Appendix Three presents a Historic Resource Management procedure for dealing with historic sites. This is indicative of the background research effort often required. Examples are also included.

Sources for material include site investigations, diaries, journals, letters, old newspapers, oral history, postage stamps, publications of the period or on the period, original writings, photographs, artifacts, music, maps, charts, pictures, monuments, films, legends and folklore.

Dependent upon the method of interpretation it may be necessary to seek professional help such as an archaeologist or architect to advise on exact methods of construction of a structure.

Sometimes minute details must be considered and thoroughly researched to ensure authenticity. For example, in a living history programme (see Section 5.1.4) an early pioneer's orchard would not have had the big, rosy apples we have today; a much smaller apple with blemishes would probably be more accurate.

When researching it is often necessary to screen information. Initial guidelines and objectives should be followed and interesting, but irrelevant tangents kept in their right place. At the same time, however, it is necessary to be prepared to be flexible. Relevant material may come to light which requires a re-defining of themes and objectives. Do not make the mistake of trying to lever the evidence into a preconceived framework; this can lead to all sorts of inaccuracies.

Be on guard for inaccuracies when researching. The first evidence found should not be accepted as gospel truth. As many angles as possible should be checked out. Newspaper clippings, while giving interesting accounts, can often be inaccurate, in fact, any publication has the potential for this. Hochstetter, an early geologist, commented in his book 'The Geology of New Zealand' on the beautiful green algae that was found growing in some of the hot pools at Tokaanu. Later, an author writing an early tourist guide-book used Hochstetter's information, but made a few changes and talked about the beautiful green ferns that grow around the hot pools of Tokaanu.

Oral history, while being an excellent source, can often be time consuming and frustrating. Again, inaccuracies should be guarded against. A number of oral sources should be checked in order to obtain different sides of the same story. It is often possible to evaluate an oral source by asking a few leading questions to which you already know the answers.

It can also be very important to ensure the involvement of the local people. This is particularly so in two ways:

- Checking the Facts

Cross referencing sources of information as widely as possible is extremely important when dealing with history. It is far better to find out facts are wrong before they are printed than after. If any 'facts' seem debatable and are sensitive in any way, they are best left out.

- Human Interest

If management wishes to add human interest stories to its interpretation, a good source is to ask Grandfathers and Grandmothers who were associated with the site in their youth, the type of stories they tell their grandchildren. If this is not possible, the stories remembered by children or grandchildren may be valuable.

However, a time must come when research finishes and work begins on the actual interpretation (although in some cases such as oral interpretation, research will be a continuing process). It is important to know when there is sufficient material and to make a cut-off point, otherwise research can continue on in a never ending search resulting in a 'boggy' mass of details.

Once the interpretive material is at a stage prior to being 'actioned' it is essential to have it checked out. This may be done by experts on the subject, local people or people with an in-depth reliable knowledge. This is another safety measure to guard against inaccuracies.

4.4 How Much Interpretation?

The nature and depth of the interpretive programme often depends on the knowledge, understanding and motivation of the visitors. The more familiar the object or subject, the less interpretation is required. For example, a house of the 1800's would probably require a greater depth of interpretation than one of the 1900's.

As many aspects of our culture become increasingly standardised and urban, many historic objects and processes will become less familiar to visitors. It may no longer be enough to label a butter churn as such, and expect the visitor to know what it is and how it is used. It seems also that as the education system has changed, the emphasis on acquiring the depth of general historical knowledge has lessened. Most people do not have the same grounding in history as was once the case. It is no longer safe to assume that people are familiar with facts such as when and who was our first Premier?

In order to satisfy the imaginations of different people, provide a variety of experiences and deal most sensitively and appropriately with each historic resource, varying methods or levels of interpretation are required. These may range from the simple sign beside an historic object to a full scale living history programme.

The depth and level of interpretation chosen may also depend on other related local or regional programmes, already in operation. In addition, a number of other factors such as finance, staff availability and expertise, and resource protection, can influence the question - how much interpretation?

4.5 Enthusiasm and Caring

A healthy enthusiasm and feel for the historic subject being interpreted is essential for a truly sound and inspired interpretation. So also is a real interest and concern for the people for whom it is being interpreted.

5. METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

5.1 Person to Person Methods

"Whether giving an informal or formal talk, answering questions, demonstrating an activity, assisting people to participate in an activity, or acting out a role in a living history programme, probably the best method of historic interpretation is one given by a well informed, enthusiastic human being. There is no equal to the elucidation given by a trained, well informed interpreter, in a person to person relationship with the visitor."

(Low, 1965: 1)

The effectiveness of two way personal communication far exceeds whatever the best signs, labels, guide-books and mechanical devices achieve. However, while being true, this statement must be balanced against such factors as the extent of visitor usage, staff and finance availability.

Old identities can be invaluable in assisting to interpret history. For, what better way to tell a story or an aspect of the past than by someone relating it, who was actually involved, or intimately acquainted with it.¹ However, it is important to use only those people who are accurate in their accounts, and have a natural bent towards the art of interpretation. Indirect person to person interpretation can also be achieved through the local people, who, if they are enthusiastic about the interpretation of local features, events and culture, can themselves be effective interpreters.²

5.1.1 Demonstrations

A demonstration (however simple it might be), of an art, craft, skill or process once

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1. Appendix Six provides examples of this role.
 2. Appendix Four discusses the integration of local people, historic interpretation and domestic tourism. (From Francis - 1986:41-43)

employed by our forebears, can be far more effective than an attempt to describe it with a thousand words. It provides a tangible link with the past and often a deeper insight into the lives of past people. In addition, a demonstration can give perspective to our lives, with its modern day products and processes.

Possibilities for demonstrations are numerous, for example, Okains Bay Museum has a bullock team to demonstrate methods of haulage on farms, bread is baked in a colonial oven, saddlery, pit-sawing and blacksmithing are also demonstrated. The Huka Falls Village has a number of craftsmen demonstrating their crafts and skills such as sweet making and blacksmithing. A stamping battery in operation at Golden Point in the Otago goldfields gives visitors a physical insight into the mechanics of crushing rock in order to obtain gold.

For successful and authentic demonstrations, craftsmen or people particularly familiar with the operation and with the necessary skills are required. Tools and equipment used should also be authentic; modern day gear should be avoided where possible.

5.1.2 Participation

Understanding and enjoyment is increased when participating in a craft, skill, activity or role playing/re-enactment of a particular piece of history is made possible for the visitor.

Participation must be physical and should involve using all the senses. It must be something that the participant would regard as novel and special, for example, a ride on a steam engine, grinding corn, experiencing food of another era, or being locked (temporarily) in an Alcatraz prison cell.

A fuller appreciation and a keener perception of events, for example, the rigours early pioneers had to face, is gained through participation. The visitor is able to 'step into the shoes' of the people of the past and 'learn from experience'. Their sense of feeling for the past is consequently enlivened and they walk away with new insights into human history.

Visitor participation and demonstrations, both of which may be included in living history programmes (to be covered in Section 5.1.4), place a strain on historic resources; original objects and structures can be 'used too exhaustively whereby they become worn out. It might be appropriate, therefore, to make accurate reproductions to be used in their place.

5.1.3 History for children

To make history 'live' for children, ideally they need to be able to participate in a multi-sensory way becoming totally involved and physically reliving history. This may be achieved by methods such as role-playing, miming, music, dance, food sampling, dressing and exploration.

Simple themes need to be chosen, for example, the difference between early New Zealand cottages and our modern furnished homes. To illustrate this particular theme a primary school teacher took his children to the Gisborne museum for a bath. The problems then ensued; no bathroom - a tub had to be set up in front of the fire, the fire had to be lit to heat the water and wood chopped to do this. At the end of the session with so much work to do, it was agreed upon that next Saturday night would be considered quite soon enough for another bath of this kind!

5.1.4 Living history programmes

In essence, a living history programme involves the re-creation of a period or event from the past, where the lives of the people who once belonged there are physically portrayed. Their clothes are worn, language and attitudes adopted, their houses lived in, food eaten and the daily process of living carried out.

These programmes are common and very popular in American national parks and historic sites. Old Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, and Williamsburg in Virginia, are two well known examples. To date, little has been carried out along these lines in New Zealand.

Living history programmes can bring home the idea that history is made of little people as well as great. A well done interpretation is fully communicative, involving the totality of physical senses as well as emotional involvement. The visitor is totally surrounded by life; the smells of baking, freshly mown hay, sounds, music, etc.

"It becomes no longer a recitation of facts and dates, but a matter of women, men and children living their lives against a backdrop of their own era, locality and economic, social and physical conditions. It gives the visitor a person with whom they can talk and interact, and from whom they can learn about day to day life of that past era."

(Lewis, 1981:82)

An understanding of history is offered that cannot be achieved as successfully by other methods. It has the ability to illustrate processes from beginning to end, for example, sheep being raised, shorn, the wool cleaned, carded, spun and woven into material, and garments made as they once were. The past becomes dramatically alive, as a precursor as well as a contrast to the present, giving insight into life as it once was and therefore is.

Much of the work on the part of the visitor is cut short with a living history programme; using the imagination, piecing things together, reading, visiting other sites in order to gain an understanding is no longer necessary. It opens an immediate window on the past they can step through to see, and become involved with: tools being used, houses being lived in, and the people in portraits walking and talking.

To be successful, living history programmes are required to be valid, accurate and in-depth. Much research and attention to detail is required to achieve an authentic result. For example, plastic framed glasses would probably be inappropriate in most programmes, short hair styles for women may not have arrived for the particular period being portrayed, therefore, long hair would be more accurate. If animals are included in the programme, they should represent as closely as possible the types of breeds once used.