



STATE PARKS & HISTORIC SITES

ROADS LESS TRAVELED

News From the Georgia State Parks, Recreation

and Historic Sites Interpretive Unit

Winter 2018



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Marketing Moment

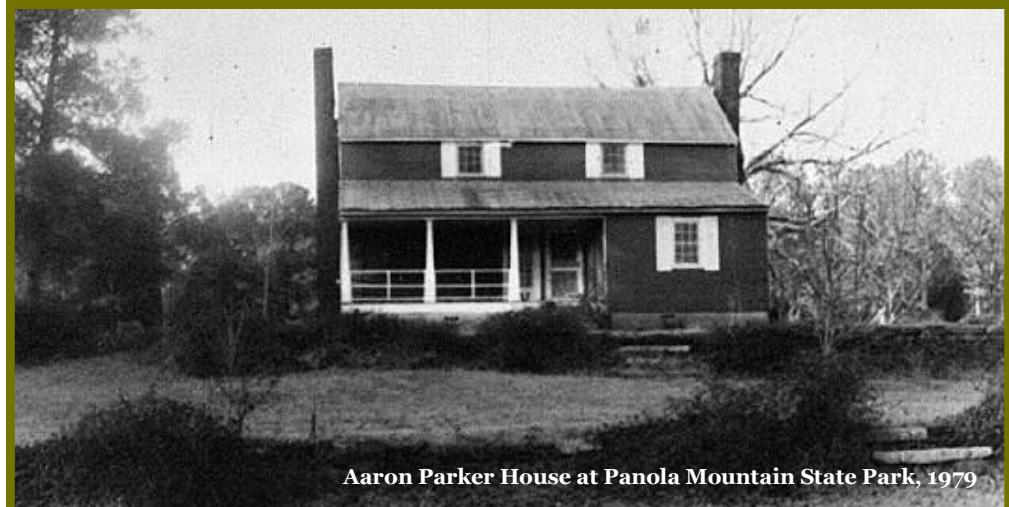
How to Write Great Event Descriptions

The way you describe programs on GaStateParks.org, social media and flyers can boost attendance. Tell readers exactly what they will do and see while keeping the description short. If you're leading a hike, answer questions like: What will they see? How long and challenging is it? What ages are appropriate? Are dogs welcome? An eye-catching title helps your program stand out among others in a long calendar listing. For example, Make Pinecone Owls is better than Nature Crafts. Be sure to follow our division's instruction's for posting events to GaStateParks.org. They can be found under **Staff Resources** in the **Marketing Tools** section: <http://explore.gastateparks.org/staff/resources/EventInstructions.pptx>

*By: Kim Hatcher
Public Affairs Coordinator*



Georgia State Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites



Aaron Parker House at Panola Mountain State Park, 1979

ROADS LESS TRAVELED

Interpretive News:

The New Year is rapidly approaching as we finalize our Fall programs and line up new ones in 2018. Our statewide program theme for 2018 is "Parks After Dark." This great theme will allow us to highlight all of the interpretive and recreation programs we host at night. Moonlight paddles, night hikes, living history programs are all opportunities to share state park resources with our visitors.



Unfortunately, the Pioneer Skills Workshop was postponed due to the clean up after Hurricane Irma. The Interpretive Unit is working to re-schedule this important training. Please stay tuned for further developments.

Park Spotlight: Mistletoe

Mistletoe is best known for being a boater's paradise, since it is located on Georgia's largest lake, Clarks Hill. Mistletoe also has over 12 miles of trails for guests to hike. The trails at Mistletoe range from easy strolls along the Nature Trail to strenuous 6-mile hikes along the Rock Dam Trail. On the trails hikers can see evidence of Mistletoe's agricultural past that has permanently marked Mistletoe's landscape, as well as active prescribed burn units managed for wildlife habitat.

During the winter months hikers can spot patches of Mistletoe hanging on hardwoods along the Cliatt Creek trail. The park received its name because mistletoe used to be so prevalent in the area that locals could come and load it up by the truck-load.

By: Justin Bettross, Asst. Manager MIS

Meet the Interpreter: Irina Garner, Vann House State Historic Site



Irina Garner joined PRHS in August of 2017 as the new Interpretive Ranger of the Chief Vann House Historic Site. She holds a degree in Arts Management from Brenau University, as well as a degree in Archaeology from the University of Georgia.

Irina's experience with PRHS began as an AmeriCorps Interpretive Programmer. She served for two years in many parks leading programs such as historical hikes, burning a dug-out canoe, awareness for pollinators and honey bees, teaching ancient artwork with clay and ochre paints, as well as assisting with field trips and large events. She is certified to guide canoe/kayak trips, teach archery and deliver first-aid/CPR.

Irina has worked archaeological digs in Georgia, as well as

paleontological sites in Wyoming, South Dakota, and North Dakota with *Paleo Prospectors*. Her paleontology portfolio includes the excavation and restoration of many specimens including Triceratops, Mosasaurus, Hadrosaurid, and a juvenile Tyrannosaurus Rex. She also has three years' experience as a stage manager, including a summer in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

If you ever need to find Irina in her off time, look to the Appalachian Mountains where you'll find her and her fiancé taking their baby to pan for gold, identifying native trees, and camping out under the stars.

She is honored to be helping preserve history at the Chief Vann House, and PRHS looks forward to great interpretive programming that she will spearhead at the site.

Words Matter: Interpretive Writing for your Audience

Writing for displays, bulletin boards, trail guides, and other interpretive material is something that many people take for granted. Poorly written and presented material, though, can undermine your interpretive message and lead to a failure to connect audiences to resources.

First and foremost, when preparing interpretive text, facts must be correct. Research topics using quality source material. Do not rely on "crowd sourced" documentation such as Wikipedia. While some articles on these type of websites may be well written and researched, others are lacking in quality. It is also a good idea to check multiple sources to verify pertinent information. Remember, just because it is on the internet, does not mean it is true. There have been too many instances to recount where lack of research has led to problems.

Sometimes, topics that relate to controversial subjects such as climate change, the age of the

Earth, and others have to be addressed. In these cases use modifying descriptors such as "scientists state" or "geologists theorize" or "historians debate." This helps avoid locking your message into an absolute statement that you may not be able to defend if questioned.

Once the research has been completed and writing begins, keep in mind that most people will not read large blocks of text. Paragraphs containing more than 150 words are likely to go unread. This requires careful and deliberate editing. It seems counter intuitive, but it is harder to write a short paragraph than a long one. Also, note that many readers will be reading at no more than a fifth grade reading level. Avoid using large words or scientific jargon. For example, if a scientific name for a plant is used, couple it with its common name.

When a draft is finished, have a "cold" reader help edit for grammatical flaws. Relying on the

spell and grammar check will let errors slip through. There are too many times where those functions have missed mistakes.

After the text is edited, look carefully at things like font size, typeface, and color. Most people will stand two to three feet from a sign or bulletin board and will hold a paper about 12-15 inches in front of them. Be sure that font size is legible from those distances. Limit the number of typefaces used in the display and ensure that they are easily legible. Fancy and unusual typeface styles can be difficult on the eyes and become a barrier to your interpretive message. The same goes for colored fonts and backgrounds. Text should contrast against the background and not get lost in an overly busy design.

When using photographs to complement a text block, use high quality images that do not pixelate or become blurry when enlarged. Do not alter the aspect ratio of the pictures by stretching or condensing images to the point

where they appear distorted. Lastly, avoid clip art images if at all possible. They usually look cheap and are over used, especially the ones that come pre-loaded on programs like Windows.

For readers interested in more information related to this subject, I highly recommend an excellent publication done by the National Association for Interpretation entitled [Interpretation by Design: Graphic Design Basics for Heritage Interpreters](#). It goes into much more detail about some of the topics mentioned in this article and is available from their website at: www.interpnet.com

*By: Judd Smith,
Parks Historian*

Interpretive-Recreation Plans and Annual Program Action Plans: What's the Difference?

All sites have recently submitted Annual Program Action Plans (AAPs) but some readers may be new to PRHS or have not yet been through the interpretive planning process. Interpretive planning in PRHS consists primarily of two distinct plans which are both related, but their uses are different.

Interpretive-Recreation Plans (IRPs) are designed to be a comprehensive document covering all areas of a park or site's interpretive efforts. This includes providing each site with a theme statement—or a guiding phrase that all programming done at that park or site should dovetail into. It looks at cultural, natural and recreational features of that location and also provides information about the communities each park services as well as contact information for all those partners. It also details surrounding schools and media contacts. Once that plan is completed, the site staff, as well as new interpreters, should have a guide to follow when it comes to interpretation. These IRPs are

designed to be updated every three to five years, with changes made as needed to contact lists, etc.

The IRPs are done in conjunction with the Interpretive Unit, usually following a meeting where ideas such as themes for the site are discussed and the basics of the plan are framed. Site staff then complete the plan by adding contact information and other "local" knowledge items. If your park or site has a completed IRP it is listed in Staff Resources at <http://explore.gastateparks.org/IRP>. If your site has not completed an IRP, the Interpretive Unit is moving steadily towards finishing them for all our locations.

The other programming related document is the Annual Program Action Plan. The AAPs are designed for planning each year's events and goals for interpretation. As this is a calendar year plan and not based on the fiscal year, this document is submitted in the fall and reviewed by the Interpretive Unit and should be a good snapshot of what a park can

reasonably accomplish with its goals for the coming year. Special events, statewide initiatives, and other important items are included on this plan. It should be looked at carefully to make sure that programs fit into the overall theme of your park or site as detailed in IRP, thus ensuring that your interpretive efforts match your stewardship requirements. As these are completed annually, care must be taken to keep goals realistic and achievable. Requesting new museum exhibits or large capital projects are not in the scope of the AAP.

As 2018 progresses, be sure to note how successful programs were and it will help you evaluate your needs for 2019. AAPs should be reviewed by not only the park interpretive staff, but the management team as well. As it is ultimately the managers' responsibility to drive programming and interpretation at the park level.

As always questions about either of these plans can be directed to the Interpretive Unit.



Fort McAllister Unveils New Exhibit

On December 9, 2017, The staff at Fort McAllister unveiled a new exhibit containing artifacts that once belonged to Lt. Colonel Joseph McAllister. These important items link the personal story of the McAllister family with the larger narrative of the site. The items were profiled in a previous issue of the *Roads Less Traveled*, but also received great press in an online Civil War blog, the *Civil War Picket*. The author, Phil Gast, interviewed not only PRHS staff, but also Mrs. Carolyn Swiggart who donated the items in her son's memory. Check it out here: <http://civil-war-picket.blogspot.com/2017/10/priceless-items-belonging-to-georgia.html>

The exhibit was crafted by DMDG2 Design out of Savannah and planning for the exhibit was funded by the Friends of Fort McAllister. It is designed to

replicate the look of existing casework and tie in with the overall theme of the site's museum.

Judd Smith, Parks Historian, provided oversight for the project. Technical expertise and artifact care were handled by Josh Headlee of the Historic Preservation Division. The Region 2 team of Tommy Turk, Bobby Wilson, and Nancy Jacobs managed the logistics and payment issues, and Jason Carter and his great team at Fort McAllister arranged the unveiling during their annual Winter Muster event. Mrs. Swiggart was on hand for the festivities and was among the first to see the artifacts on display.

The Interpretive Unit and staff of Fort McAllister are sure that these artifacts will serve to inform and educate park visitors for years to come.



Dahlonega Gold Museum Exhibit Upgrades Underway



This year the Dahlonega Gold Museum is undergoing its first renovation in over twenty years. The project is the culmination of over two years of design work and planning. PRHS worked with Signature Design out of Atlanta to develop comprehensive exhibits focused around the site's major thematic elements such as the causes and effects of the gold rush, the mining of gold and minting of coins, and the role of the historic courthouse.

In FY 18, PRHS was awarded bond funds to proceed with the building and installation of the exhibits. E&C has worked closely with the site staff and the Interpretive Unit to ensure that the bid and pre-construction phases have moved smoothly. HPD has been involved from the outset as well, to oversee movement of artifacts in advance of the changes.

The scheduled completion date for the installation is May 2018; stay tuned for future updates.

Georgia State Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites

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gastateparks.org

A Great Time, Every Time!

Mission

To protect our state's natural beauty and historic integrity while providing opportunities for public enjoyment and education.

Vision

Using our system's diversity and a commitment to excellence as our strengths, we will be a national model for quality service, resource protection, outdoor recreational opportunities, ecosystems management and interpretation of our heritage. We will provide an excellent work environment for our employees through effective leadership, proper training, challenging opportunities and a guarantee of fair treatment.



Vogel State Park, November 2017

Parting Thoughts and Takeaways:

I recently had occasion to be at Vogel State Park at the height of leaf season, and I was reminded of the journey that John Muir took through our state during the fall of 1867. 150 years ago, Muir set off to explore the southeastern United States and chronicled his trip through diary entries in a book entitled A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf. The day to day happenings and meetings he notes are interspersed with beautiful illustrative prose like, “*The Chattahoochee River is richly embanked with massive, bossy, dark green water oaks, and wreathed with a dense growth of muscadine grapevines, whose ornate foliage, so well adapted to bank embroidery was enriched with other interweaving species of vines and brightly colored flowers.*” Muir’s journey took him through Gainesville, Athens, Augusta, and ultimately to Savannah. On his travels, he walked in

the footsteps of an earlier naturalist who also wrote about Georgia –the botanist William Bartram.

Bartram and his father explored the colony of Georgia in the 1770s, and his travels are re-counted in the classic Travels of William Bartram. For interpreters of Georgia’s history or natural resources, it should be required reading. His commentary on the cultures he encountered and the flora that he noted (including the flower for which our Gordonia-Alatamaha State Park gets its name) make it an indispensable primary research source.

As a park ranger, I cannot help feeling the presence of these giants as I visit our parks. Knowing that they hiked in the same area that I may be walking today is a powerful, if intangible, force. Their journeys and writings make it clear how passionate they

were for the world around them and should serve as both motivation and warning to us — many of the places they mention are no longer there, having become shades of memory existing only in text.

As interpreters we continue the journeys that these giants began so many years ago. We must always encourage our guests to enjoy these natural and cultural masterpieces. We must provoke them into caring for those places, and we must instill in them that same sense of wonder that was felt by John Muir and William Bartram then, and us today.

Until Next Time,

**Happy Programming,
Judd Smith**