

# Reviews

## *INTERPRETING THE ENVIRONMENT.*

Edited by Grant W. Sharpe. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. New York, London. Hardback : 566 pages : Illustrated. £10.80.

THIS book should be essential reading in any University or school that professes to teach a course in forest recreation. It should be a book of prime importance to those who manage or who interpret the environment of recreation lands. Why?

To date this is the only comprehensive work published on this illusive subject. The information offered is comprehensive, practical and lucid. It comes, not from the mind of one man, but from the collective experience of many in the field. Above all the presentation is fresh, never mundane and never violates the sound philosophic principles on the subject as laid down by Freeman Tilden. (*Interpreting our heritage*, Univ. N. Carolina Press).

The book divides itself into five sections.

(a) The interpretive process : This section introduces the reader to the origins and development of wild land interpretation and concludes with thoughts on the production and management of interpretive plans.

(b) The techniques of interpretation : By far the most important and most difficult aspect of interpretive work. Ten chapters in all grapple with the problems involved. The difficulty with proper interpretation is that it is based on solid scientific knowledge yet this knowledge must be presented in a form suitable to the understanding and experience of the park visitor. Satisfactory interpretation is an art which depends for its level of success on the individual skill of the interpreter.

This block of ten chapters is the red meat next to the bone. Collectively they have successfully confronted this most difficult aspect of interpretation. If this section had fallen down in its deliberations on this central core of the subject matter I would have rejected the total book as irrelevant.

(c) Supporting activities : This section I feel is not too important for our present needs. However, there are two chapters that I would draw attention to — one deals with aspects of marine interpretation, and the second interprets the sky (astronomy). Both subjects are usually ignored by interpreters. Due no doubt in the main to lack of knowledge in these areas, but also I feel that

traditionally interpretation has commonly had a forest setting, and things of the stars and of the dark trenches of the sea are not quite forestry!

(d & e) The last two sections conclude the text with thoughts on education in the field of interpretation and introduces the reader to interpretative processes in several countries. The chapter here which examines the personal attributes of a good interpreter is note worthy : It removes a lot of misconceptions and sheds light on the personality requirements of an interpreter. Interpretation is not a science but an art imbedded in the personality of the interpreter.

In reviewing books it is customary for the reviewer to find some faults or omissions, if for no other reason than to suggest that he himself is a fine astute fellow who, if he had not so many other pressing commitments, could himself sit down and turn out a book superior to the one under review. For this review I can find no fault. At best I can offer our readers a caution — the tone and temperament is North American in outlook. The historic past and the prevailing disposition of a people produce a national attitude towards wild things. In my view, Ireland is a country of small scale geography, of gentle hills and forest and lonely bog — to interpret these lands for forest visitors this book of ideas will be invaluable as long as one is conscious of, and does not incorrectly portray this mood of our wild places.

P. Mac Oskair