

The Turquoise Trail Corridor Management Plan

Version 1.0

8.0 Intrinsic Assets Interpretation Plan

8.1 WHAT IS INTERPRETATION?

Interpretation is explaining and designing information about local resources for visitors in an entertaining and educational way. Historic, archeological, natural, cultural, recreational, and scenic resources and attractions can all be effectively interpreted. Interpretation can be accomplished through the use of signs, exhibits, publications, staff members (i.e., interpreters), recorded messages, radio broadcasts, and audio-visual presentations. The method used depends on the type of visitor (e.g., family groups, senior citizens, and sports enthusiasts), the information that needs to be communicated to them, budgetary factors, and the type and location of attractions and resources.

The tourism industry today often focuses on promotion - advertising tourism facilities and attractions to attract visitors. Unfortunately, once visitors arrive in an area, they often find it difficult to learn more about local attractions and resources. Through interpretive techniques, communities and regions can provide information about local attractions and resources to visitors and residents.

Why is this important? Providing visitors with entertaining, educational information about the area that they are visiting gives them a reason to stay longer. As the stays of visitors are lengthened, more tourism dollars pour into a community. Because word-of-mouth is the most effective form of advertising, the experiences visitors have while in an area can make or break its tourism program.

The impacts of interpretive programs on area residents are equally as important. Because of the educational nature of interpretive facilities and publications, it is very common for them to be extensively used by school groups and other not-for-profit institutions and organizations. Educating residents about community projects and resources can serve to boost public support of community goals, and to expand residents' knowledge of the local resources, which they see daily and often know little about.

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Interpretative facilities and publications are usually designed with at least one of four purposes in mind. These are:

1. To increase visitors' awareness about a resource or attraction. Most communities abound with local legends, history, and unique landmarks and sites. However, most of these facts remain in the minds of local residents and are not made available to visitors. Through interpretive exhibits, signs, publications and other media, these fascinating bits of information can be used to enhance the visits of people from outside the area as well. Communicating this information not only increases visitors' awareness of what your community or organization has to offer, but gives visitors an idea of what life in your community is actually like.
2. To alter the behavior patterns of visitors and residents. When creating a change in the behavior patterns of visitors is important, either for management or recreational purposes, interpretation can help. Instead of just telling visitors to do or not do something, interpretive techniques explain why they should or shouldn't. For instance, a trail at a local park may receive so much use that it is becoming eroded. Although a new trail has been established to direct visitors away from the eroded section, visitors are still using the original trail. An interpretive sign posted at the entrance to the old trail stating, "Overuse of this trail has caused erosion - Help nature rebuild it by using another route," would help alleviate this problem. A sign stating "Stay off the trail" would only make visitors more curious about what's on the trail. The USFS is currently using this technique at the Sandia Crest.
3. To explain community, organization, or agency goals and objectives to visitors and residents. When communities and organizations educate people about their goals and objectives, they not only increase visitors' and residents' awareness of their purposes, but foster community support of them. Often, community support is the deciding factor in the success of a program or organization.
4. To orient visitors to an area. Directing visitors to different attractions and resources, and educating them about what they can expect to find at each is important for promoting an area. This helps visitors identify which attractions and resources they are interested in seeing, and simplifies their travel routes during their visits.¹

¹ Kuehn, Diane, Cultural Tourism Specialist author of "An Interpretive Planning Guide for Communities Along Scenic Byways and Corridors" revised September, 1996, pp 3,4
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Interpreting the resources and attractions along scenic byways and corridors is necessary to attracting, educating, and entertaining the visitors traveling them. Interpretive facilities and publications encourage visitors to stop at attractions during their travels and learn about the area they are visiting, extending their visits. When scenic byway and corridor resources and attractions are effectively interpreted, the routes become, in effect, "museums without walls".

Every scenic byway and corridor needs a specific theme to give visitors an accurate idea of what types of resources and attractions they will see if they travel along it. Often scenic byways that are very long have one main central theme connecting several sub-themes. By using several sub-themes, diverse visitor groups can be attracted to the byway.

It is important to match the type of interpretation to the type of traveler (e.g., independent traveler or group tour). For independent visitors traveling the Turquoise Trail Scenic Byway on their own, on-site interpretation is extremely important. This includes signage, brochures, exhibits, audio-visual presentations as well as interactions with interpretive specialists at sites along the route. Independent travelers will also rely on materials that they have picked up or purchased prior to driving the byway such as seasonal visitor information and tour guide books.

Interpreting a Theme

When designed and planned for properly, interpretation relays a theme or message to visitors. The theme of an interpretive program is the concept, idea, or message that you want visitors to take away with them. One major program theme connects each component (e.g., tour, sign, exhibit, publication) of your interpretive program. Each individual component either relays the overall theme of the interpretive program or has its own "sub-theme" which communicates only a portion of the program theme. Interpreting all the sub-themes together communicates the entire program theme.

Both themes and sub-themes are communicated to visitors by interpreting specific topics. While themes and sub-themes relay a message or concept, topics relay specific subject matter or information related to the theme. For example, the theme of a community's interpretive sign program might be "local industries have a tremendous impact on the economy of this area." One of the signs within the program might have the sub-theme "hydropower is an important source of electricity for our community." This sub-theme would be communicated to visitors through the following topics: "the history of hydropower," "how hydropower works," and "local hydropower facilities."

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To effectively communicate themes, interpretation should incorporate three major learning components: educational, emotional, and behavioral. The educational component is the information that you want people to learn from your interpretive program; the emotional component is how you want them to feel after experiencing it; and the behavioral component suggests an action for them to take. While the educational component gives visitors the necessary information to make a decision, the emotional and behavioral components enable them to act on their knowledge. For example, an interpretive sign designed to keep visitors out of a fragile wetlands area would explain what the impacts of visitor use on the wetlands area are (educational component), how this harms the wildlife of the area (emotional component), and how visitors can prevent this impact by staying on boardwalks in the area (behavioral component).²

How are Resources and Attractions Interpreted?

Many methods and media can be used to interpret resource information. These include the use of publications, signs, exhibits, audio/visual media, and interpretive staff (i.e., interpreters). The interpretive technique used must reflect the information itself, the location and type of resources and attractions to be interpreted, and the needs of visitors. Proper planning will ensure that the interpretive technique chosen is well suited to the area and visitors.

² Kuehn, Diane, Cultural Tourism Specialist author of "An Interpretive Planning Guide for Communities Along Scenic Byways and Corridors" revised September, 1996, pp 5, 6
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Interpretive centers

Interpretive centers are very useful in some locations because they provide a central location at which resource information is interpreted. Interpretive centers are usually comprised of a central building that houses interpretive exhibits, but they may also offer self-guided trails, interpretive signs and publications, and tours and presentations by interpreters. Because interpretive centers usually provide information in diverse ways, they are effective at attracting diverse visitor groups.

Benefits:

1. They provide a central location for interpreting information.
2. They are effective at attracting visitors to an area and often boost the local economy.
3. They can be used to attract diverse visitor groups.

Constraints:

1. Interpretive centers are costly to build and maintain.
2. They usually have specific hours of operation and may not be open to visitors at all times of the day.
3. They usually need to be staffed.

Questions to consider:

1. Do the resources in the area presently attract enough visitors to warrant the construction of an interpretive center?
2. Would focusing resource information in an interpretive center make local resources more attractive to visitors?
3. Would the center be located within easy traveling distance from one or more major population centers?
4. Is there public support for this effort?
5. What agencies or organizations would be responsible for developing the interpretive center?
6. Would an interpretive center help protect intrinsic qualities through education?

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Interpretive exhibits

Interpretive exhibits are displays comprised of interpretive text, illustrations, photographs, audiovisual aids (e.g., light-up features, taped messages, videos, computer simulations), and/or three dimensional components (e.g., mold-cast structures and artifacts). Interpretive exhibits, when designed properly, promote "hands-on" interaction by visitors, and are especially useful for educating children. While state-of-the-art exhibits can be extremely costly, effective interpretive exhibits, by using easily obtainable objects and artifacts, do not need to be. Although most exhibits are produced for indoor display only, by taking into account local climatic and environmental factors, outdoor exhibits can also be produced.

Benefits:

1. Exhibits promote hands-on interaction.
2. They present information in diverse ways.
3. They are attractive to visitors.

Constraints:

1. Exhibits can be expensive to produce.
2. They usually need to be installed indoors (i.e., in a shelter or interpretive center).
3. They are not available for viewing at all times of the day when installed in an interpretive center.
4. They frequently need maintenance.

Questions to consider:

1. Would the theme and topic to be interpreted be best communicated through a three-dimensional medium like an exhibit?
2. Where will the exhibit be located?
3. Will the exhibit be displayed indoors or outdoors? If "out ' doors," what environmental and climatic factors do you need to consider when creating it?
4. Who will maintain the exhibit?
5. Will this exhibit be sturdy enough to survive hands-on interaction with visitors?
6. Will interaction with the exhibit be possible for all visitor groups (including children and physically disabled people)?

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Interpretive publications

Interpretive publications can be divided into two distinct types: those that guide visitors through an area from one attraction to another (i.e., interpretive guidebooks), and those that interpret information about a single resource or attraction to visitors (i.e., interpretive brochures). Unlike tourism publications designed for promotional purposes that only list attractions and resources, interpretive publications explain about them. Interpretive publications can include text, photographs, and illustrations.

Benefits:

1. Publications can be relatively inexpensive to produce (this depends on the materials used in the printing process).
2. They can relay a relatively large amount of information to visitors.
3. Visitors can easily carry them.
4. Different publications can be used to communicate different themes, attracting more than one visitor group.
5. They can be mailed to visitors prior to travel, encouraging visitation.

Constraints:

1. Publications are sometimes not available to visitors at all times of the day.
2. Some visitors do not enjoy reading on their vacations.

Questions to consider:

1. Does the information in the publication need to be available at all times of the day? If "yes," brochure racks or some other information dissemination mechanism must be used.
2. How much information will be included in the publication (i.e., how long will it be)? How will this affect its printing cost?
3. Do you need a publication that guides visitors from one attraction to the next, or one that simply interprets information about a specific local resource or attraction?
4. How will your publication be distributed? The distribution method you choose (e.g., direct mailings, brochure racks) will influence the size of the publication.

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Video and slide presentations

Video and slide presentations are useful mechanisms for relaying interpretive information. They can be incorporated into interpretive center exhibits, shown in a theater-type setting or classroom, or used for promotional purposes. Depending on the type of projector purchased, interpretive staff may or may not be required to start and rewind the presentation. Depending on their length, presentations can be repeated on a single VHS videotape to enable up to two hours of nonstop showing. Equipment for playing these presentations varies from automatic slide projectors to combined VCR/TV units to combined VCR/projector units.

Benefits:

1. They are effective at visually involving visitors.
2. Showing presentations that have a soundtrack requires little involvement by interpretive staff.
3. They are easy to move to different locations.
4. They project a large-size image.
5. They can show visitors a facility without making an actual tour necessary.

Constraints:

1. Video and slide presentations are often only available for use when interpretive centers are open or interpretive staff is available to show them.
2. They can be expensive to produce.
3. Video equipment can be expensive to purchase and maintain.
4. The flow of information in an audio/visual presentation cannot be easily altered once produced.

Questions to consider:

1. Is the information to be interpreted best communicated using both sound and visual effects? If "yes," the production of video/slide presentations may be feasible.
2. Where will the presentation be used: in a theater setting, in a classroom, as part of an exhibit, or on a TV or cable TV station? How will this affect its length (e.g., a video used in an exhibit might be 60 seconds long, while one used in a theater is 15 minutes long)?
3. Who will be responsible for maintaining the equipment?
4. Will a staff member be responsible for starting the presentation, or will visitors be able to start it themselves by pushing a button?
5. Will broken equipment cause visitor dissatisfaction?

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Radio Transmissions

Low power AM radio transmissions, also called traveler information sources (TIS), are sometimes used at specific attractions and in communities to interpret information to visitors and orient them to an area. The amount of transmitter power of the radio station determines the distance that the radio signal will travel. The weakest TIS radio station normally broadcasts with 0.1 watts of power, covering a distance of 0.5 miles. Stronger stations can broadcast with up to 10 watts of power, covering about 2.5 miles. Unlike the weaker 0.1 -watt stations, the higher-wattage stations require licensing under the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and must be operated by or in association with a governmental unit. Signs indicating the transmission frequency need to be installed along travel routes to alert visitors to the information available.

Benefits:

1. Because FCC licensing is not required for 0.1-watt stations, programming and station setup for these is flexible
2. Any visitor riding in a motor vehicle containing a radio can tune in to the information.
3. Up-to-date information can be incorporated into the programming and changed as needed.
4. Radio transmissions can be altered via telephone access.

Constraints:

1. Because of the limited transmission distance, TIS are not suitable for attractions that cover extremely large areas such as long scenic byways or corridors.
2. The initial costs for station construction and equipment purchase are high.
3. Staff time is required to update the transmissions frequently.

Questions to consider:

1. Is the area small enough in size to make the use of a TIS feasible?
2. Will someone on staff be able to update the information frequently?
3. What type of information will be communicated (i.e., safety tips, events and programs, self-guided tour information)?
4. How will the different messages be sequenced together for transmission?

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Interpretive staff

Hiring people to interpret resource information to visitors remains the key to motivating visitors to interact with their surroundings. Besides their educational roles, interpreters sometimes have other job responsibilities such as providing security for an area or managing an interpretive center. Interpreters can be involved in two forms of interpretation: first-person and third-person. First-person interpreters act out and dress the part of the person they are interpreting. Third person interpreters communicate information to visitors without portraying another person. Interpreters can be either volunteers or paid staff. Both can be effective as long as they are properly trained and dedicated to giving visitors a quality educational experience.

Benefits:

1. Interpreters can provide one-on-one interaction with visitors (e.g., answering questions, leading tours).
2. They can motivate visitors to try different recreational and educational activities.
3. They can quickly alter presentations to meet visitors' individual needs.

Constraints:

1. The salaries of paid interpreters can be expensive.
2. Depending on work schedules, interpreters may not always be available for visitors.
3. Training interpreters can be expensive and time consuming.

Questions to consider:

1. Would the information to be interpreted be most effectively communicated through an historical enactment, demonstration, presentation, guided tour, or other type of interaction between staff and visitors?
2. Will interpreters be used for special presentations and tours only, or will they have an additional responsibility as well (e.g., administrative responsibilities)?
3. Will you hire professionally trained and educated interpreters, or use volunteers?
4. If you are using volunteer interpreters, how and by whom will they be trained?
5. Who will pay for the service?

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Interpretive signs

Interpretive signs are panels on which resource information is interpreted to visitors through text, photographs, illustrations, and three-dimensional components (e.g., carved designs). Depending on their construction, signs can be used either indoors or outdoors. Signs are mounted on displays, which physically anchor them to a site. Displays can take the form of single or multiple panels, kiosks, or different types of shelters. Because the amount of information that can be included on signs is limited, signs are not suited to every interpretive effort.

Benefits:

1. Signs can be used either indoors or outdoors.
2. When placed outside, signs provide a continuous source of information for visitors at all times of the day.
3. When designed correctly and placed in a suitable location, signs are effective at catching the attention of visitors.

Constraints:

1. Signs have limited space for interpretive information.
2. They are subject to vandalism and deterioration caused by environmental factors.
3. They can be expensive.

Questions to consider:

1. Does the information to be interpreted need to be available to visitors at all times of the day? If "yes," a sign is a feasible choice.
2. Are the sub-themes of each sign too broad to be adequately interpreted on it?
3. Who is going to maintain the signs? What type of maintenance will they require?
4. Is the durability of both the sign and display suited to local environmental factors and resistant to vandalism?
5. Will the sign display allow for easy removal and storage during periods of extreme weather conditions (e.g., winter, and severe storms)?
6. Will all visitor groups be able to use the sign (including children and physically disabled people)?

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World Wide Web

The World Wide Web (WWW) is creating new opportunities for interpretation. Interactive home pages are now popular with many interpretive centers and attractions for interpreting information to visitors and for promoting the attraction itself. Some museums have developed WWW tours that enable the viewer to "explore" the facility and its exhibits on the computer, allowing him or her to "open" artifact drawers and peer inside. Others use the sites mainly for promotional purposes and to inform users about how to obtain more information about the facility. Home pages can be developed in-house, but often a consultant is hired to design and program them. Computer programs that simplify the creation of home pages are currently available.

Benefits:

1. WWW home pages are available to all viewers who can access a computer linked to the WWW.
2. Home pages are effective at promoting facilities and attractions.
3. WWW "virtual reality tours" enable visitors to view a facility without spending time and money to travel to it.
4. For evaluation purposes, it is easy to identify the number of times viewers access a site.
5. WWW home pages can be set up so those viewers can order publications, make reservations, and join organizations.

Constraints:

1. Purchasing WWW access through an on-line service can be expensive.
2. Designing home pages and interactive WWW sites involves staff member knowledge of computer programming, hiring a consultant, or purchasing a computer program that simplifies home page setup.
3. Updating the information on a WWW site may be needed on a regular basis.
4. The computer equipment needed to provide a WWW site is costly.

Questions to consider:

1. Will someone on staff be able to monitor and update the WWW site on a regular basis?
2. Will use of a WWW site help your facility meet its goals?
3. Is your WWW site for promotional purposes, educational purposes, or both?

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Recorded Messages

The use of recorded messages for self-guided tours or as part of exhibits is increasing. They are being produced for tours of large areas such as scenic byways, and for smaller areas such as interpretive centers and communities. Both cassette tapes and compact disks can be used. Because many motorists have cassette or compact disc players in their cars, developing recorded messages for use in large areas can be especially useful to them. While compact disks are more durable than cassettes, the high initial expense involved in purchasing compact disks and players may not be feasible for all purposes. If the recording is to be used by visitors at an interpretive center, ear sets are suggested in order to not disturb other visitors. Battery recharging units may save money in the long run.

Benefits:

1. Recorded messages are useful for interpreting to visually impaired people.
2. They are useful for self-guided tours.
3. They are effective for communicating stories, anecdotes, and quotes.

Constraints:

1. A mechanism for lending, renting, or selling the tapes/compact discs must be established (e.g., through a visitor center).
2. The maintenance and replacement of compact disk and cassette players can be costly.
3. The initial investment in tapes, compact disks, players, and message development may be costly.

Questions to consider:

1. Is the information to be interpreted most effectively communicated through stories, anecdotes, and the use of sound effects? If "yes," the production of recorded messages might be feasible.
2. How will cassette/compact disk players be distributed to visitors? What incentive will be used so those visitors return the borrowed equipment (e.g., cash deposit, holding driver's license)?
3. Who will be responsible for maintaining the equipment?
4. Who will produce the recording?

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Meeting Visitor Needs

In order to effectively develop an interpretive program, you need to know what type of visitor group your area or facility attracts. Each visitor group has its own unique needs, wants, and expectations. Because of this, interpretive programs need to be planned with these factors in mind. If you do not know what type of visitor is attracted to your area, you need to find out before proceeding with any planning efforts. Surveying the visitors that are presently coming to your area can do this. Their age groups, educational levels, interests, occupations, facility needs, and group compositions (e.g., school groups, families) need to be identified. Interpretive development considerations for different visitors are listed below.

Physically Disabled Individuals

Most interpretive programs should be designed for access by physically and visually disabled people. The construction of wheelchair ramps, automatic doors, and elevators are important for all facilities, including interpretive centers and rest areas. Signs and exhibits should be kept relatively low (30 to 34 inches from the ground to the bottom edge of the sign or exhibit is preferred) so that people sitting in wheelchairs can read and interact with them. Lettering on signs and exhibits should be large and easy to read for visually impaired people. Signs with raised or carved surfaces (e.g., carved or sandblasted wood signs, and mold-cast signs) are especially useful since they enable visitors to use their sense of touch. If possible, Braille signs and publications, and/or taped messages should also be available for use. When interpretive programs and presentations are being given sign language interpreters or subtitles on visual presentations should be available.

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Touring groups and recreation enthusiasts

Portions of the TTSB can be toured by bus, car, bicycle, skis, and hiking. Each type of recreation group has different needs. When designing touring loops, visitors need to be informed about the location of facilities, including rest areas, restaurants, overnight facilities, and repair and supply shops, as well as any dangerous land forms, obstacles, or detours. For bicyclists, separate bike lanes (a width of six feet is recommended) clear of debris are necessary, as well as rest areas, supply stores, lodgings, and campgrounds. Hikers likewise need to know the location of overnight facilities, water, and grocery stores. All terrain vehicle users need to be informed about the location of trails legal for ATV use, access points, any needed permits, and gas stations. Bus tour organizers should consult with bus companies when developing a tour loop to make sure that the roads selected are wide enough for buses, and that there are no low bridges or other impassable structures on them. Also, they should be sensitive to quiet neighborhoods where bus noise and diesel fumes are not desired.

Special interest groups

Interpretive facilities often attract visitors that know more about the information being interpreted than the "average" visitor. These visitors often come in groups from various organizations (e.g., bird watching groups). In order to promote interest from these groups, more detailed information needs to be provided. Specialized publications, guided tours, and other presentations are effective.

Children

Children have a short attention span. Because of this, interpretive programs for children should promote active participation and hands-on interaction. Interpretive staff and interactive exhibits are the best forms of interpretation to choose for children, and information should be presented in many diverse forms. When developing guided tours for children, plan for rest room and snack breaks. Signs and exhibits should also be kept relatively low to the ground (30 to 34 inches from the ground to the bottom edge of the sign or exhibit is preferred) so that children can see and reach them. Steps should be attached for hard-to-reach exhibits.

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Family groups

Because families usually include both adults and children, interpretative programs for them should be directed toward various age levels. The key to meeting the needs of these age groups is to keep the information presented as diverse as possible, in both level of difficulty and type of information presented. Providing opportunities for parents to work with their children on activities can provide rewarding experiences for all.

Senior citizens

Interpretive programs designed for senior citizens need to take into account the possibility that some program participants may have limited mobility and visual and hearing impairments, while others will not. Providing guided tours to seniors can often be challenging since some seniors move quickly ahead, while others require more time to get from one point of interest to the next. The difficulty and length of all activities and trail terrain should be stated at the beginning of all activities and tours. The presentation of information should be diverse (e.g., use both signs and recorded messages on a self-guided tour) so that information is communicated to both visually and hearing impaired individuals.

Cultural or ethnic groups

Interpretive programs designed for cultural or ethnic groups need to take into account different cultural norms and language barriers. Areas promoting their tourism and interpretation efforts to citizens of foreign countries should have printed materials available in foreign languages. Interpreters should learn basic foreign language skills; speak slowly and clearly articulate when communicating; and be aware of socially acceptable or unacceptable actions and norms for the group. Tours are especially useful to foreign visitors since they emphasize important information about the area.³

8.2 EXISTING INTERPRETATION

Currently there is one brochure produced by the TTA that promotes the TTSB. This brochure was updated in 1999 from an earlier version and the major purpose is to promote businesses and attractions on the scenic byway. Over 200,000 copies were produced and distributed. In 1999, the TTA had a three dimensional, four sided diorama exhibit with brochure racks at the Albuquerque International Sunport. The association also has a website, www.turquoisetrail.org, it uses for promotion, some interpretation, and communication regarding the CMP process.

³ Kuehn, Diane, Cultural Tourism Specialist author of "An Interpretive Planning Guide for Communities Along Scenic Byways and Corridors" revised September, 1996, pp 7-17

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8.3 INTERPRETATION GOALS

- A. Tell the story of the Turquoise Trail Scenic Byway.

8.4 INTERPRETATION OBJECTIVES

- A. Develop specific themes for interpretation such as mining and other history, scenery and nature, archeology, people who traveled the Turquoise Trail centuries ago, and recreation.

8.5 STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE INTERPRETATION

- A1. Develop an audio tape driving tour of the TTSB.
- A2. Develop an expanded travel guide for the TTSB including more interpretive materials on culture, history and archeology.
- A3. Develop short brochures or flyers on TTSB themes such as mining history, bird watching, etc.
- A4. Develop and produce interpretational kiosks at new developments along the byway.
- A5. With the USFS, develop and publish new interpretive materials regarding forest intrinsic qualities and assist in private sector marketing campaigns.
- A6. Develop an archeological exhibit and web site at the Museum of Archeology and Material Culture.