

## From Inventory to Interpretation: A Definition of Process \*

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### Abstract

This paper is an outline of masters research in progress which will attempt to develop a strategy for interpretive planning for Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario. From the first stage of cultural and natural features inventory within the area of interest, there will be an overlay of other factors of importance using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and matrices. The eventual result should be a reduction of options to succinct recommendations for an interpretation plan.

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Interpretation can be defined as an “educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information” (Tilden, 1967). Interpretation is vital to parks and other protected area agencies for increasing tourism, educating visitors, guiding their actions and creating meaningful experiences. Given such weighty purposes, a well-defined process for developing interpretation plans must exist. To the contrary, much interpretation seems to occur on an ad hoc basis. There is little heritage agency documentation regarding the process of moving from the resources inventory stage to an interpretation plan.

This research will make use of the sixteen Nature Areas on the Trent University Symons Campus, Peterborough, Ontario (Figure 1). These areas, totalling approximately 300 hectares in size, have been inventoried for significant natural features and some historical features and designated as protected by Trent University. Notably, little interpretive use of the Nature Areas has occurred and no overall interpretation plan has been developed. This makes them an ideal pilot case for development of a process resulting in definition of interpretation opportunities. The anticipated result of this research in April 1999 is a practical and economically feasible natural and cultural interpretation plan for the Trent Nature Areas, complete with implementation strategies and budget requirements.

Ultimately, this step-wise process for development of an interpretation plan could be used for parks internationally. Times of fiscal restraint and increasing environmental awareness are resulting in a reassessment of the “meaningful experiences” that parks and protected areas are providing. A well-defined basis for planning interpretation should be a part of this shift.

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\* This report arises from a poster paper at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the Parks Research Forum of Ontario.

## Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

1. to develop a process of interpretive planning for parks and protected areas; and,
2. to make recommendations for implementation of an interpretation plan for the Trent University Nature Areas.

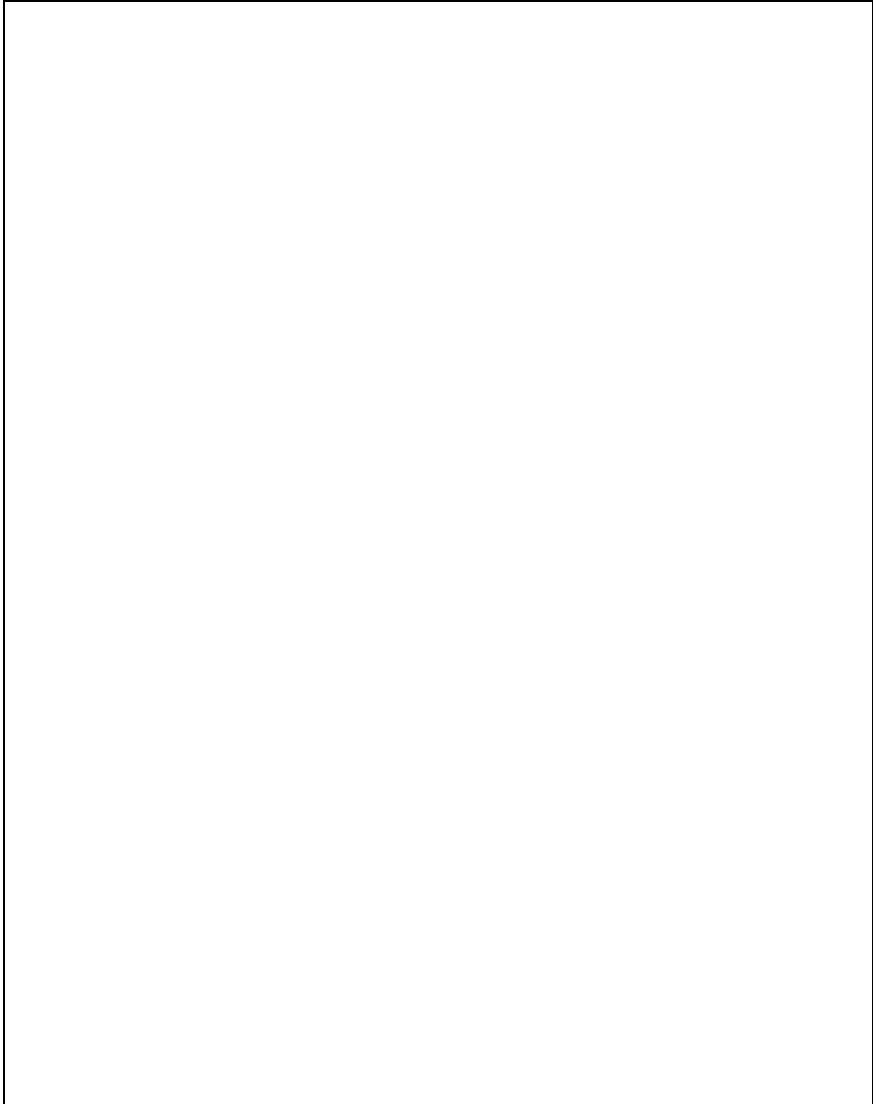


Figure 1: Trent University Nature Areas

## **Methodology**

1. To develop a process of interpretive planning for parks and protected areas:
2. Literature review
3. Interviews with interpretation professionals
4. Development of a matrix/mapping overlay system

To implement an interpretive planning process for Trent Nature Areas:

1. Literature review
2. Field work in Nature Areas
3. Interviews with area professionals familiar with the Trent Nature Areas
4. Market opportunities survey
5. Use of matrix/mapping overlay system
6. Budget estimates for interpretation options

Factors to be considered for interpretive planning:

- natural and cultural features
- market opportunities
- safety hazards
- funding
- agency mandate
- areas of significance
- management/use conflicts
- interpretation potential
- interpretation techniques

## **Expected Results**

1. A comprehensive strategy for interpretation planning
2. A practical and economically feasible natural and cultural interpretation plan for the Trent Nature Areas

## **Reference**

- Tilden, F. (1967). *Interpreting our Heritage*. 2nd ed. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press.