



## **Sharing is Caring: What is Interpretation and Why Does it Matter in Tennessee State Parks?**

— by **Meg Guy**

As the East Tennessee Regional Interpretive Specialist for Tennessee State Parks, I am called upon to support park interpretation. No, I don't mean translation of foreign languages into English... but rather a way of translating the natural landscapes and cultural significance of parks.

Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines interpretation as:

- 1: the act or the result of interpreting: EXPLANATION*
- 2: a particular adaptation or version of a work, method, or style*
- 3: a teaching technique that combines factual with stimulating explanatory information*

Explanation, adaptation, teaching, and stimulation all apply to my work as an interpreter. But interpreting the resources of state parks goes beyond just reciting species names or historical dates. Interpretation tells stories and helps visitors discover personal meaning and really feel the significance of these protected places.

The National Association for Interpretation (NAI) defined interpretation more specifically in 2007:

*Interpretation is a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource.*

I think the most important component of this definition is the phrase, "forges emotional and intellectual connections." Interpretation doesn't just answer "What?" but also answers "So what? Why should I care?" Interpretation should guide park visitors toward self-discovery and connect them to natural and cultural resources in a meaningful, personal way.

Then there's the phrase, "communication process." What does this look like in state parks? The most obvious examples are in-person, interactive activities led by park staff such as guided hikes, canoe floats, tours, lectures, campfire storytelling, craft programs, etc. that directly connect with park visitors. Ranger-led programs provide personal interpretation for park visitors... and the opportunity to have fun while learning!

Tennessee State Parks' Seasonal Interpretive Ranger program is a major component of my job duties as Regional Interpretive Specialist... and a crucial element of park interpretive efforts statewide. I am tasked with recruiting, hiring, training, administering, and coaching/mentoring these part-time staff known as SIRs in 19 parks across East Tennessee. The week before Memorial Day kicks off the summertime, every SIR receives

basic instruction on developing and presenting engaging, relevant, and thematic in-person programs. Seasonal Interpretive Rangers are then sent forth to each of the state parks to provide programs for the guests flocking to parks during the busiest visitation season. Hopefully, you've had the opportunity to have fun with an SIR at a state park near you!



Seasonal Interpretive Rangers (SIRs) for Tennessee State Parks in 2023

And interpretation goes beyond guided hikes, Junior Ranger camps, and other personal experiences directly facilitated by park staff. There is such a thing as non-personal interpretation, too. Examples include descriptive signage and exhibits such as those found in museums, visitor centers, or along trails. Such displays may provide details or illustrate the underlying stories of artifacts or landscapes that may otherwise go unnoticed. Signs and exhibits can reach a much larger audience of park visitors than scheduled interactive programs and are often park visitors' first exposure to explanatory information about park resources... and may spark an interest to learn and experience more.

Why does interpretation matter in Tennessee State Parks? It's all part of the purpose... both personal and non-personal forms of park interpretation must be mission-based, of course. The mission statement of Tennessee State Parks is "to preserve and protect, in perpetuity, unique examples of natural, cultural, and scenic areas and to provide a variety of safe, quality outdoor experiences through a well-planned and professionally managed system of state parks." I believe that interpretation is one of the most important tools our agency has to accomplish this objective and share quality experiences with visitors to Tennessee State Parks. Interpretation encourages conservation and helps convert park visitors into park stewards. Remember, interpretation is all about the connection! And more people sharing a connection to Tennessee State Parks leads to more people caring about these special places... so they can be preserved and protected for future generations. Sharing really is caring!

**Meg Guy has served TN State Parks as a Seasonal Interpretive Ranger, a Park Ranger and as Park Manager of Roan Mountain State Park prior to becoming the East Tennessee Regional Interpretive Specialist. Meg will present *Discovering the Wonders of Parks Through Interpretation* at the RMSP Conference Center on Friday, Sept. 8, at 7:30 PM.**



# Fall Migration: A fascinating Annual Display of Nature

Ron Hoff, a birdwatcher for 46 years now and counting, will present a program on the amazing annual event known as FALL BIRD MIGRATION. This show of nature is very broad in scope and plays out over a 5 month period here in North America, so it doesn't lend itself well to simple explanations. Ron will try to give an overview and then some specific components of Fall migration that should keep folks interested. One of these incidents was back in 2003, while on a birding trip to Bolivia, Ron and his wife ran across a Swainson's Thrush. This is a species that nests along our Arctic coast yet it has evolved to migrate from there all the way to Bolivia to overwinter. Another experience took place on a trip to the Antarctic Islands of New Zealand in 2004. When they were on Campbell Island, they



Photo by Ron Hoff

spotted 2 Bar-tailed Godwits, birds that nest in Alaska. If this island was shrouded in fog when these 2 birds showed up and they overflowed it, they would most assuredly have perished at sea as there are no more islands until you get to Antarctica. This program will include some of Ron's bird photos and interesting information on some recent research into Fall Migration. The program will be followed with a question and answer session at the end.

Ron Hoff has served the Tennessee Ornithological Society in many positions since 1973, culminating as TOS president in 2013-2015. He continues as state TOS bird count compiler, a position he has held for over 20 years. Ron has now photographed more than 5326 species of birds! His presentation will take place at the RMSP Conference Center on Sept. 9 at 7:30 PM.

## TWIN SPRINGS UPDATE



Friends of Roan Mountain partnered with the U.S. Forest Service this summer to make additional improvements and repairs to Twin Springs Recreational Area. FoRM contributed money to purchase one grill and provided labor helping to install it and a second one, both adjacent to the picnic shelter. In addition, Randall Rogers constructed a tabletop to attach to a post beside one of the grills. FoRM also purchased a sheet of Lexan to repair the damaged sign display in the Twin Springs parking lot. FoRM appreciates the assistance of Chad Ingle of the USFS in accomplishing this, as well as Gary Barrigar, Randall Rogers and Ken Turner for their work.

Our FoRM July Summer Picnic attendees enjoyed the fruits of all this labor in the beautiful and cool Twin Springs environment. Excellent food and convivial conversation filled the afternoon air!



## *In Memoriam*

Friends Member, Daniel M Russo, passed away June 28, 2023, after a lengthy battle with Parkinson's Disease. Dan was born on October 30, 1935 in the Bronx, New York. He was a graduate of Rutgers University and served in the US Army. He retired from East Tennessee State University where he taught Economics for 30 years.

Dan was an avid hiker and an accomplished runner. After retiring, he worked with numerous Tennessee State Parks to establish 501(c)(3) support organizations for the parks, as well as for Friends of Nature (Johnson City Parks & Recreation). He volunteered at Roan Mountain State Park on the Appalachian Trail to cut back invasive species of plants and was active in the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy organization. Some of his work at Roan Mountain included being involved in the revitalization of the Hack Line Trail, and in having it recognized as an official trail by the National Forest Service. He participated in counting rare and endangered plants on a section of the Appalachian Trail for both the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the National Heritage Association.

He was active in restoring the natural cranberry bogs in Shady Valley, Tennessee. With his wife, Rosalie, he took bottled water and healthy snacks to Appalachian Trail Thru-Hikers during summer months, as well as taking food and water to Jamey Donaldson when Jamey was tending blackberry-eating goats along the balds between Jane Bald and Grassy Ridge. Rosalie, authored and illustrated *Baa-iley the Goat*, a children's book, and donated proceeds to the Baa-tany Goat Project.

A favorite Trip Leader for the Friends of Roan Mountain Naturalists Rallies, he is best remembered by those attending his historic wildflower hikes from Carver Gap on the Hack Line to its end.

The family requests that donations be made to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, PO Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425.

– Anne B Whittemore

## **GIFTS AND MEMORIALS**

***Friends of Roan Mountain gratefully acknowledges these charitable gifts***

### **Memorial Gifts**

**Rebecca Nunley & Richard Brosmore in memory of Sutton Brown**

### **Donations**

**Warren & Diane Edwards**

**Donald Fisher**

**Linda Good**

**Terri Joyce**

**Virginia People**

**Terry Schmidt**

**Welch Charitable Family Fund**

**Amazon Smile Charitable Contribution**

## **Annual Membership Meeting**

Friends of Roan Mountain will hold its annual membership at 6:00 PM Saturday, September 9th, in the conference center. At the meeting you will receive information regarding the activities, projects and finances of the organization. The election of board members will be held. The following have been nominated for this year's election: Pam Baldwin, Gary Barrigar, Richard Broadwell, Chris Campbell, Ken Turner, Anne Whittemore. Nominations from the floor may be made at the meeting.

The annual meeting provides an opportunity for the membership to give their input concerning the policies and activities of FORM. Any member wishing to submit an item for the agenda of the annual meeting may do so by contacting Gary Barrigar, [friendsofroan@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofroan@gmail.com).



# Summer Discoveries at Xtreme Roan Adventures



Every year there are exciting discoveries at Xtreme Roan Adventures.

This year, on the Free Friday Night Adventures, there were exciting discoveries on the Hike-a-delic Experience. The Adventurers used UV flashlights on the after-dark hike. A different world was revealed. Crab spiders glowed white on the red stem of goldenrod. Many flowers looked totally different. Solid yellow flower petals showed unique patterns under UV light.

On the Animal Helpers Adventure on Saturday, the Adventurers discovered the very gentle and calm 8-ft-long black snake. Other impressive rehab animals displayed were bats, baby turtles, and groundhogs. The Adventurers were happy to know that the box turtle, Cracken, is progressing nicely. Its cracked shell is patched with J-B-Weld. It will soon be returned to the wild.

Many new families joined the Friends at registration. They are already looking forward to next year's Xtreme Roan Adventures, July 26-27, 2024.

## Rally Fun!



Photos by Ken Turner, Larry McDaniel  
and Michele Sparks



## **ROAN MOUNTAIN STATE PARK HAPPENINGS**

### **Facility upgrades at Roan Mountain State Park:**

We have had another busy summer here at Roan Mountain. We have lots of construction going on currently in our cabin area. Cabins 1-20 are all getting new siding, paint, windows, and new porches. Cabins 21-30 are scheduled to have the kitchens and bathrooms remodeled within the next year as well beginning November. Progress continues on the Interpretive Museum renovation. Our first phase is scheduled for completion within the next few weeks and we look forward to showing it off.

The visitor center museum is slowly coming together. Work began last week on the large mural. The water wheel building has been remodeled and converted into an indoor classroom space with an on-park archival room for historical documents and museum items that need to be preserved. This is set to open when the visitor center museum renovation is completed. Our first phase is scheduled for completion within the next few weeks and we look forward to showing it off.

Currently, we have a crew of 19 volunteers here working on the park for the next two weeks doing various projects. Those projects include converting the old picnic area into a primitive tent and hammock camping area, redoing the amphitheater storage room, painting the whole amphitheater, demolition of the observation decking on the old Peg Leg Trail, finishing the kitchen work at the Farmstead, fixing the chicken coop, painting the Farmstead house, painting the festival sign and Christmas displays, some trail work, and a few other various projects.

We have shown a slight increase in visitation from FY21/22 - **1,201,380** to FY22/23 - **1,547,950**.



### **Miller Farmstead News:**

As we get into the fall, we'll be making some changes to the garden beds at the Miller Farmstead to reflect mostly local flora, with a few historically-relevant plants. We've already started removing invasives from a number of beds and we've also started an adopt-a-plot volunteer program to assist with routine gardening and planning. This has resulted in valuable assistance and progress!

### **Southeast Bumble Bee Atlas:**

Marcianne is conducting bumblebee monitoring for the Southeast Bumblebee Atlas at the Miller Farmstead. The goal of the project is to inventory species present across the Southeast. Volunteers are welcome to participate and may contact Marcianne for training on how to collect, document, and report findings. Informal reporting is also welcome, via the BumbleBeeWatch app.



**Used Book Sale**

At our Fall Naturalists Rally there will be a book sale of nature-oriented books from the collection of Robert & Anne Whittemore covering the Appalachian Trail, identification of birds, butterflies, rocks, wildflowers, trees, caves, geology, as well as maps. Reasonably priced from \$5 to \$20, first come, first served. Proceeds will be donated to a worthy cause.



# PURSLANE (*Portulaca oleracea*)

-- Anne B Whittemore

While visiting Russell Cave National Monument in early May, I bought several books dealing with medicinal plants, one of which I lent to a friend. She reported later of having a really bad case of hives with itching and burning for almost two weeks, when she decided to check the book I'd lent her for a remedy. Purslane was recommended as a solution, and she cut the plant, crushed the leaves, mixing it with water, applying the mixture on a test patch of hives. While other places on her body continued to itch and burn, the itching was completely stopped on the test patch!

Another friend returned from vacation with an unidentified rash, and I searched for possible homeopathic remedies for her. Purslane looks like a good fit, and I hope she will try using it. A third friend grows purslane in raised beds primarily for salads, although the plant can also be boiled in a very little amount of salted water, served with butter or oil and vinegar dressing and is a fine vegetable to add to soups and stews. The taste is similar to asparagus. Thus, to my surprise, a plant which I thought was an obnoxious weed, turns out to be a potheb with many uses and benefits!

Purslane grows as a thick, mat-like ground cover about eight inches high. Its oval-shaped leaves, approximately one inch long are thick and glossy, scattered along red stems, and clustered at the ends of the branches. Small yellow flowers 1/4" wide, with 4-6 petals, grow alone in the leaf clusters and open for only a few hours in the morning sun from June through September. The plant is widely distributed, likely native to North Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent. It reached North America by pre-Columbian times and was in Europe by the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. The plant is equally at home in flower beds, cultivated fields, roadsides and other disturbed places, and has been grown for more than 4,000 years as a food and medicinal plant.



Being packed full of nutrients, vitamins, and minerals, it is often deliberately planted. Purslane is a superb source of antioxidant vitamins A, C and E, and also contains riboflavin, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium and iron. It is the richest known plant source of omega-3 fatty acids, and may help reduce the risk of heart disease by lowering cholesterol and blood pressure, and by reducing the tendency of the blood to form clots in the arteries.

Purslane is a great tasting green vegetable with a sour twist; the leaves taste slightly citrusy and salty with a peppery kick like arugula. Eating the raw leaves can help improve digestion, strengthen the immune system, and promote good heart health. It can also, as noted above, be used as a topical remedy for irritated skin and will help wounds heal faster.

While Native Americans probably ate purslane, their main interest was for medicinal purposes. The juice, applied directly, was found to soothe burns, insect bites and stings, and earaches. Tea from the leaves could relieve headaches, stomach pain, and urinary tract infections. It was used in Europe as a poultice for inflammation, sores, eczema, and abscesses, and could be used to treat and prevent scurvy. A cup of leaves in water mashed with pestle or potato masher to extrude the juice, can be used as an excellent skin cleanser and astringent, and may be useful in treating acne and wrinkles!

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# Friendly Reminders



**MEAL Orders** – Payment for Fall Rally meals must be received by Tuesday, Sept 5th .

The reservation form can be found in the brochure or on our website. Mail your check and reservation form to Nancy Barrigar, 708 Allen Avenue, Elizabethton, TN 37643.

**You can now register online. Find the [link](#) and rally brochure on our website's homepage.**



**Door Prizes** -- We gladly accept items donated for door prizes. These will be given away on Friday and Saturday prior to the evening programs. Ideas: nature-related books, photos or art, outdoor gear, plants, homemade goodies . . .

*If you prefer to read your FoRM newsletters online (color version) email [friendsofroan@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofroan@gmail.com) with your request.*

I go to nature to  
be soothed and  
healed, and to  
have my senses  
put in order.

—John Burroughs

	Spring Rally	Last Friday - Sunday in April	April 26 - 28, 2024
	Youth - XRA	Last Friday & Saturday in July	July 26 - 27, 2024
	Fall Rally	Friday - Sunday in September after Labor Day	Sept 8—10, 2023
	Winter Rally	Saturday in February near Valentine's Day	February 17, 2024