

Jon Kohl

An Interpretive Resume of My Interpretive Communications and Development Experience

“There’s no reason to expect poor interpretation to accomplish anything beyond sheer entertainment, if even that... Unless interpretation accomplishes its basic aim of provocation, it can’t hope to produce any other kind of outcome consistently.” **Sam Ham, *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose***

Interpretation Done Well Can Improve This World

Interpretation branches off the conventional communications tree by provoking people, through emotional and intellectual connections, into a state of deeper thought and appreciation about a person, place, thing, or idea so when that person comes back up, their newfound appreciation drives their participation in the achievement of environmental management objectives.

Interpreters, in fact, cannot resist the compulsion to better this world, especially through heritage conservation, both for the environmental benefits it provides as well as the historical lessons about the universe and humanity it reveals. Interpreters create experience opportunities during which people activate their imagination to enter a story and therein discover significant meanings normally hidden behind the outwardly obvious. When the intimacy of relationship between people and heritage expands, their enthusiasm also expands to celebrate and protect that heritage.

Writing/Storytelling Is Critical to a Professional Interpreter

In fifth grade, I earned the highest town-wide score on a fiction-writing test. Aside from ego inflation, that achievement sent me down a path of creative and then academic writing. Understanding the craft of storytelling is perhaps the best background an interpreter can have. Many literary techniques — suspense, themes, authenticating details, characterization, plotting, conflict development — all translate directly to interpretive performances. Through writing and editing, the jump to interpretation proved less treacherous. See last page for partial list of interpretation publications.

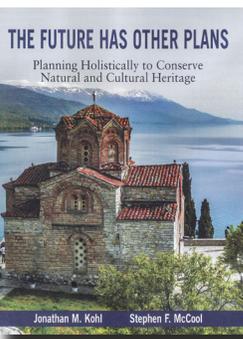
- Now working with the National Museum of Costa Rica to write interpretive signs for Guayabo National Monument
- *Fallout*, a SciFi romance novella, co-written with Kimberly K. Comeau, published by Bookstogonow.com
- Column in *Legacy*, the magazine of the National Association for Interpretation called, “International Interpreter”
- Bilingual blog “International Heritage Interpretation,” www.facebook.com/heritageinterpretation, since 2011, 950 followers from over 50 countries
- Some pubs: *Wildlife Conservation*, *Parks*, *Parks & Recreation*, *The Boston Globe*, *E*, *World Heritage*, *Native Peoples*, *Caribbean Travel & Life*, *The Interpreter*, *Legacy*, *Interpnews*, *Boletín de Interpretación*, *Journal of Interpretation Research*, *Interpretation*

Magazine Editors Constantly Churn Out Provocative and Often Interpretive Stories

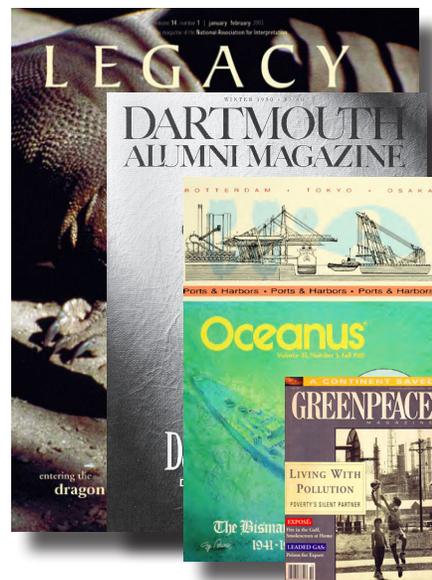
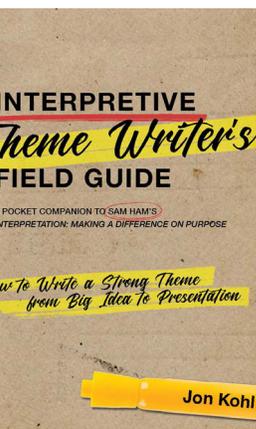
- I served as intern for *The Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* 3 years (cover story on Dartmouth and the environment); summered for *Oceanus* of Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and *Greenpeace Magazine* in Washington, DC
- At Dartmouth College, I founded *Sense of Place* magazine in 1989, the first formatted publication to be transmitted across an e-network in the world. Assisted and covered by mentor [Donella Meadows](#) and *The New York Times*.
- Edited high school newspaper and co-founded its literary magazine
- Contributing editor of *Legacy* under Alan Leftridge; cover story on Komodo Dragons; honorable mention for feature of the year in 2010 on guiding.

Every Interpreter Should Brandish a Camera

At first my photography merely supplemented my writing, but later became a passion unto itself. I take pictures with a simple camera, easily concealed and good photo editing taught by my photography mentor, Chris Willis. The picture of the mantis was a finalist in the 2013 *Organic Gardening* magazine photo contest. I completed a professional photoshoot of tourism products at Mistico Park in Costa Rica. [See my best photos on Flickr.](#)



Published December 2016, the book traces deep reasons for plan implementation failure and offers a new way forward. For more information, click [here](#).



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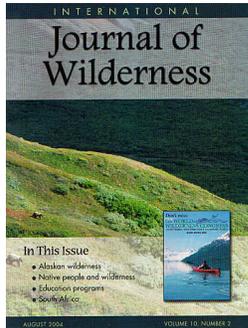
Ask for my general CV that includes almost everything
 (English o español)

16 May 2021

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See my talks and keynotes



I won an essay contest at Yale about the relationship between zoos and wilderness; I later published “Zoo Behind the Wild Facade”.



Carlos Rosero and I facilitate the interpretive framework for El Cocuy National Park

Public Speaking Is Another Base Skill of Field Interpreters

When I took Persuasive Speaking at Dartmouth, I discovered a passion for performing in front of people.

- Peace Corps educator and interpreter at the National Zoo of Costa Rica. Attended over 6,000 children.
- Naturalist at the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Massachusetts Audubon Society
- Speaker in the US State Department Strategic Speaker Initiative that sent me to talk about interpretation and ecotourism in Ecuador, Bolivia, Cameroon, Liberia, Swaziland, and Malawi
- Keynote speaker for conferences of the Wisconsin Association for Environmental Education, Colombian Network for Sustainable Tourism, Mexican Congress on Alternative Tourism (twice), as well as invited speaker at the Universidad Externado and National Training Service in Colombia, many interp conference presentations. Currently on a speaking tour about Holistic Planning related to my book.
- Book speaking tour. Talk uses interpretive and TED techniques; given over 15 times in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

I Wander in Purgatory between Academia and the Field

Drs. Sam Ham and Susan Jacobson accepted me fully paid to be their doctoral student, but I stayed in the field.

- Exhibition researcher for the Smithsonian Institution’s Office of Environmental Awareness’s traveling exhibit, *Ocean Planet*, curated by [Judy Gradwohl](#)
- Taught environmental interpretation and protected area planning at the University of Costa Rica and the University for International Cooperation (ELAP) in Costa Rica
- Research and publishing: *International Journal of Applied Education and Communication* (comparison of environmental education and interpretation), *The Journal of Interpretation Research* (systems thinking and meaning creation), *International Journal of Wilderness* (wilderness and the modern zoo), *Journal Interpretation* (community interpretation); currently working on authenticity’s role in expanding the applicability of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum with [Dr. Stephen McCool](#), my protected area planning and management mentor; currently working on a book with McCool on emerging paradigms in heritage area planning
- Attend and present at NAI, AIP, and InterpEurope national and international conferences.
- Named associate editor of the *Journal of Interpretation Research*, November 2019

In hindsight, one foot in theory and the other in practice should be the posture of every professional interpreter.

Interpretive Themes Provoke and Guide Deeper Appreciation

Based on the seminal research of Ham on the centrality of thematic interpretation, I have innovated the craft of fashioning “strong” interpretive themes with universal connections. I have also advanced the interpretive framework, a hierarchical set of themes that links essence, processes, themes, and heritage created through a consensus process to represent a community’s view of its own site and its relationship to the larger universe. In fact, I published a book on theme writing (see the cover on first page and listing on publications page.)

At Fermata, Inc. I worked with the concept originator (Shomer Zwelling) to craft the [Lumber Heritage Region Interpretive Plan](#). Later I created 3 more interpretive frameworks (see Poconos example to left) before developing the tool as part of participatory interpretation and community development. See some favorite messages:

- Behind the artistic beauty of the colonial architecture of Antigua, Guatemala, can be found the hidden intention of the conquistadors to dominate the artistic expression and customs of indigenous peoples.
- Governments fight drug trafficking where the cocaine supply grows in Colombia, while invisible and blameless consumers in distant lands drive the demand.
- Ants have innovated farming strategies (aphid herding and fungi cultivation) millennia before people “invented” their own farming systems.
- What distinguishes World Heritage Sites from other protected areas is the facility with which the Sites can tie together the heart of a person with the heart of humanity.
- The collapse of human civilizations is not a history of the slow disappearance of the capacity to provide basic services, but a long ignorance of declining indicators by society’s leaders.
- Sex between two people as well as the spiritual motive to improve the world are manifestations of the same creative impulse that has made the world more complex and mysterious since its beginning: The Big Bang.

Experience in Participatory Interpretive Frameworks (frameworks available upon request):

- World Heritage City of Evora, Portugal (see participants at right)

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- CATIE university in Costa Rica (through University of Costa Rica project)
- Union Island in St. Vincent and the Grenadines
- El Cocuy National Park in Colombia (USAID; photo to left)
- La Libertad Park in Costa Rica (University of Costa Rica student thesis project)
- Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, Albuquerque, New Mexico (US FWS)
- Tayrona National Park, Colombia (US NPS, National Parks of Colombia)

See this [workshop video](#) on participatory interpretive frameworking given at the InterEurope/NAI international interpretation conference in 2013 in Sweden. [Article](#) in *Interpretation Journal* (AHI) on the same topic (June 2014).

Interpretive Training Must Consider the Development Context

Most interpretive trainings are one-off events, more beneficial to instructors than students because they do not follow basic precepts of adult education or place the training in a larger development context. This connection to organizational development makes my training unique, resulting in [Principles of Performance Building and Training](#). I have worked with organizations for different intensity trainings throughout the Americas in English and Spanish:

- World Birding Center, South Texas and Costa Rican Bird Route
- National Institute of Biodiversity national naturalist guide certification interpretation module, Costa Rica
- National Parks of Colombia in Otún Quimbaya, El Cocuy, La Macarena, Tayrona Colombia
- The Organization for Education and Environmental Protection and USAID in El Cocuy National Park, Colombia
- Outside Madidi National Park, Bolivia, a national training for ecotourism professionals sponsored by the US Embassy, Conservation International, and other local partners
- RARE Center for Tropical Conservation Nature Guide Training Program in Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico
- Ríos Tropicales tour company in Costa Rica with river rafting guides
- USAID/ProParque for interpretive training for interpreters and planners for several parks, Honduras

I conceived and manage the PUP Consortium's [Spanish interpretation webinar series](#) so that Spanish-speaking interpreters and guides can advance skill and connect without the international community without feeling isolated.

Interpretive Planning Needs to Become More Participatory

- Visitor Experience Community Engagement Framework, Boulder Outdoor Space and Mountain Parks, 2018-19
- Visitor Experience Plan 1.0, Fire Island National Seashore, NPS, with Consensus Building Institute 2016-17
- Site plan and interpretive messages for Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, Albuquerque
- Six-day interpretive planning and design workshop for national parks in Honduras, with USAID/ProParque
- Four-day interpretive planning course for Spanish National Parks and main workshop for AIP's '14 conf., Madrid
- Poconos Mountains Region, Pennsylvania (interpretive framework) (Fermata, Inc.)
- Illinois River Valley, Illinois (interpretive framework) (Fermata, Inc.)
- Quinta Mazatlan, Texas ([full interpretive plan](#)) (Fermata, Inc.)
- Lumber Heritage Region, Pennsylvania (team-based full plan) (Fermata, Inc.)

I wrote a [book](#) (Fulcrum Publishing, Dec. 2016) on emerging paradigms in heritage planning with Dr. Stephen McCool which includes making interpretive planning a more participatory, community-driven process.

Interpretation Should be an Integral Part of Heritage Management

Without doubt my most important professional contribution has been the development of the Public Use Planning Process that helps heritage site communities to develop capacities to overcome barriers to plan implementation through collaborative planning and innovations to evade barriers. Interpretation has proven an integral part of public use or visitor management since the methodology began in Pico Bonito National Park, Honduras in 1998. The process is now part of the [PUP Global Heritage Consortium](#) which I founded in 2013.

Interpretation Is Collaborative: My Partner: Marisol Mayorga

I met Marisol when I worked at the Costa Rican National Zoo in 1994. Since then we have intertwined and shared our careers. Interpretation is definitely a team sport.

- She has coordinated the Interpretation Program at the University of Costa Rica for six years until 2014, allowing me to make innumerable guest lectures and teach classes. She now teaches in the Ecological Tourism major.
- She pursues her PhD at Kansas State in interpretation under guru, Ted Cable and Ryan Sharp.
- We are contracted by the National Distance Learning University to write Lat. Am.'s first university text on interp.

Holistic Training: Putting Trainees Back into Context
JIM FOSTER



Being a former trainee with an ecological systems, his research has been a case study in the training that has been used to train others in the world. Learning about what he has done within the context of what it is to be a trainee, and how that training program has impacted his life as the "trainee" or as a participant in education of other park visitors, is more than just a story. It is a story that is being shared with others through his own research and writing.

Because Foster's research, design, and writing that also includes and continues to be updated. The research that he has done is a good example of the local environment. To complete this capacity to be a trainee in education, he has been able to use his own research and writing to help others learn about the world. He has been able to use his own research and writing to help others learn about the world. He has been able to use his own research and writing to help others learn about the world.

Published in *Reflections*, the Journal of the Society of Organizational Learning, the article ([download](#)) overviews the training philosophy behind the Interpretive Training Program.

See [PUP brochure on interpretive training](#).



The PUP Manual won second place in the NAI media awards in the category of training materials.

See the [PUP Global Heritage Consortium website](#)



WEBINARIOS SOBRE INTERPRETACIÓN DEL PATRIMONIO



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Interpretation in Latin America Needs Organization

As director of the PUP Global Heritage Consortium one of our objectives is to promote interpretation in Latin America. We do this through our webinars, publications (see upcoming books), and most of all the coorganization of the First Latin American Congress on Heritage Interpretation. As co-organizer I worked with Dr. Antonieta Jimenez (on the PUP board of directors) as well as professor at the El Colegio de Michoacan in Mexico to organize this historic event in October 2018. It was a teleconference with transmission centers at the University of Costa Rica, Tropical Science Center in Costa Rica, El Colegio de Michoacan, National School of Conservation, Restoration and Museography in Mexico, National Learning Service in Colombia, Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, Universidad Científica del Sur in Peru. Together we organized the largest interpretation event in the history of Latin America and PUP played a pivotal role. The second congress is tentatively scheduled for the second half of 2020.



In March 2019, I worked with the co-organizers of the Congress to launch the Latin American Network for Heritage Interpretation which in the future will organize the Congress. We also launched its [Facebook page](#) and we are planning a periodical.

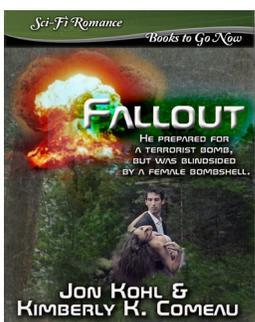


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Some Interp Pubs



Articles in *Legacy* between 2003 and 2004 were part of my regular column called “The International Interpreter”. 23 articles in *Legacy* in total.



Using Adobe Premier, I have a number of self-produced videos in English and Spanish found at PUP's Youtube Channel



“Talking climate with those holding different worldviews.” (June 2021). *Yale Climate Connections*.

Esencia de la interpretación de patrimonio: Una visión holística para experimentar y conservar el patrimonio natural y cultural de América Latina. (May 2021). Second author with Marisol Mayorga. First university textbook for/by Latin America. Central America university publisher, UNED. See [cover](#). [Ebook version](#).

“Heritage Interpretation Enriches the Park Experience.” (December 2020). *Parks & Recreation* magazine.

“Four Levels of Interpretive Development Based on Tilden’s Principle of Wholeness.” (November 2020). *Journal of Interpretation Research*.

“Going Galactic: Expanding Heritage Interpretation to Include the Potential Influence of Extraterrestrial and Extradimensional Beings.” (May/June 2020). *Legacy*. Cover story. Co-written with Dr. Sean Esbjörn-Hargens.

“Interpretation’s Moral Obligation to Save Civilization: 10 Steps to Interpret for Salvation.” (Jan/Feb 2020). *Legacy*.

Interpretive Theme Writer’s Field Guide: A Pocket Companion to Sam Ham’s Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose: How to Write a Strong Theme from Big Idea to Presentation. (November 2018). National Association for Interpretation.

“Effective Interpretive Planning: More than Just Answering Technical Questions.” (Mar/Apr 2017). *Legacy*.

“Beyond the Interpreter’s Words: Experiences Erupt from the Visitor’s Entire Context.” (Jan/Feb. 2017). *Legacy*. Cover story (picture of my son to left) and based on a webinar given for NAI.

“Elaboración de los productos y programas de uso público en los parques nacionales.” (2016). Co-author with Ramos, Calvo, Perales, Martínez. Red de Parques Nacionales: Cuadernos 6. Book on interpretive planning.

“Book Review: *Tour Guiding Research: Insights, Issues, and Implications*.” (May 2015). *J of Policy Research, Leisure, & Events*.

“Self-Worth, Self-Identity.” (June 2014) *Interpretation* Journal, Association for Heritage Interpreters, UK.

“The International Interpretation Conference: Bringing the World’s Interpreters Together.” (March 2014). Review of international interp conf, Sigtuna, Sweden, June 2013. *Journal of Community Archeology and Heritage*.

“A Systems-Based Interpretive Planning Model that Links Culturally Constructed Place Meanings and Conservation.” (November 2008). *Journal of Interpretation Research*. Co-author Ted Eubanks. NAI publication.

“Way Beyond Darwin: Evolution of Human Consciousness and the Future of Interpretation.” (May/June 10). *Legacy*.

“Dodging Cuts: Surviving budget cuts for heritage interpretation means becoming relevant.” *Parks & Recreation* (3/07)

“Visitor Centers: If You Build Them, Will They Come?” *E Magazine* (Nov/Dec 2000), *Legacy* (Jul-Aug 2002)

“The Boneyard Classroom.” *The Boston Globe* (13 September 1993 and reprinted in *Sanctuary* January 1993).

“¿Qué es realmente real? Nueva visión de la autenticidad y su papel en la interpretación y el turismo alternativo.” (02/13). *Boletín de Interpretación*. Also in *Legacy* as “What Is Really Real?” (Nov/Dec 2014).

“Heritage Interpretation vs. Environmental Education as an Ecotourism Conservation Strategy.” Chapter in *Ecotourism and Conservation in the Americas*. (2008) Edited by Amanda Stronza & Bill Durham. CABI Pub.

“Putting the Ecotour Guide Back into Context: Training Guides with Systems Thinking.” Chapter in *Quality Assurance and Certification in Ecotourism* (2007). Edited by Rosemary Black & Alice Crabtree. CABI Pub.

“Putting Environmental Interpretation to Work for Conservation in a Park Setting: Conceptualizing Principal Conservation Strategies.” (02/05) *Applied Environmental Education and Communication Journal* 4(1).

“Hurdles to Teaching Guides to Interpret Biodiversity Conservation.” *Legacy* (Aug, 2001). Hon. Ment. Best Feature