

CHAPTER 2

THE PLACE AND NATURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL INTERPRETATION IN NATURE-BASED TOURISM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a discussion of the concept “interpretation” and its historical perspective in order to provide a background on the role of interpretation in nature-based tourism. Following this a broad overview of tourism in national parks is provided, a discussion which culminates in highlighting the purposes of interpretation in nature-based tourism. The roles of tour guides in national parks are clarified with specific reference to their use of interpretation and the importance of communication competence in interpretive guiding. Finally, the chapter explains the EROT model of interpretive communication, which forms an important part of the conceptual foundation of the study.

2.2 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE TERM “INTERPRETATION”

As interpretation has grown in stature, in an effort to bring to it greater definition, purpose and direction, its meaning and processes have been increasingly examined (Cho, 2005:26).

Interpretation encompasses many possibilities in many different places and contexts and as a result the public is often confused about what interpretation is or what interpreters do (Beck & Cable, 2002:5). A number of definitions and outcomes for interpretive programmes by professionals and leaders in the guiding profession have

been offered over the last half-century (Newsome *et al.* 2002:239; Littlefair, 2003:29). Most people think of interpretation as the process through which a person translates from one language into another, for example, Spanish to English or English to Spanish. At its most basic level, interpretation is translating (Ham, 1992: 3). Interpretation is the translation of language or information from one source to another in order to facilitate comprehension and understanding. Environmental, natural history, heritage, and cultural interpretation are no different. These types of interpretation involve the translation of the language of the scientist, the voices of the past, and the significances of the place to create meanings and connections with the people of the present (Ward & Wilkinson, 2006:2).

According to Littlefair (2003:29) and Ham (1992:3) the first author to define interpretation formally was Freeman Tilden in 1957, a view shared by White, Virden and Cahill (2005:63), who regard Tilden as among the earliest to attempt a formal definition. Tilden was not a scientist, naturalist, historian or technician of any kind, rather a playwright and philosopher (Ham, 1992:3). Tilden (1977:8) defines interpretation as an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information. Tilden saw interpretation as an approach to communication which lays emphasis on the transfer of ideas and relationships, rather than on isolated facts and figures (Ham, 1992:3) the emphasis on communication is a view shared by Moscardo (1999:5), who says definitions of interpretation are about communicating but laying the emphasis on visitor enjoyment, on exciting curiosity and on contributing to conservation.

When viewing interpretation in this way, it must be understood as ordinary communication would be understood, that is, as a commonly used and simple communication model with its basic elements. These elements are the communication source, the encoder, the message, the channel, the decoder, and the communication receiver (Espinoza, 2006).

Although an environmental interpreter may use factual information to illustrate points and clarify meanings, it is concepts and ideas that they are first trying to communicate, not simply facts (Wearing & Neil, 1999:58). It is about communication and learning of ideas and concepts, and imparting an appreciation of the natural environment involved. Therefore meanings and relationships, as messages, should be well communicated to the receiver through appropriate means (Espinoza, 2006). That is why Civitarese, Legg and Zuefle (1997:10) view the following as an appropriate modern definition of environmental interpretation:

Interpretation is a communication activity designed to enhance the quality of the recreational experience of the visitor and to inspire greater appreciation of the resource in an enjoyable manner.

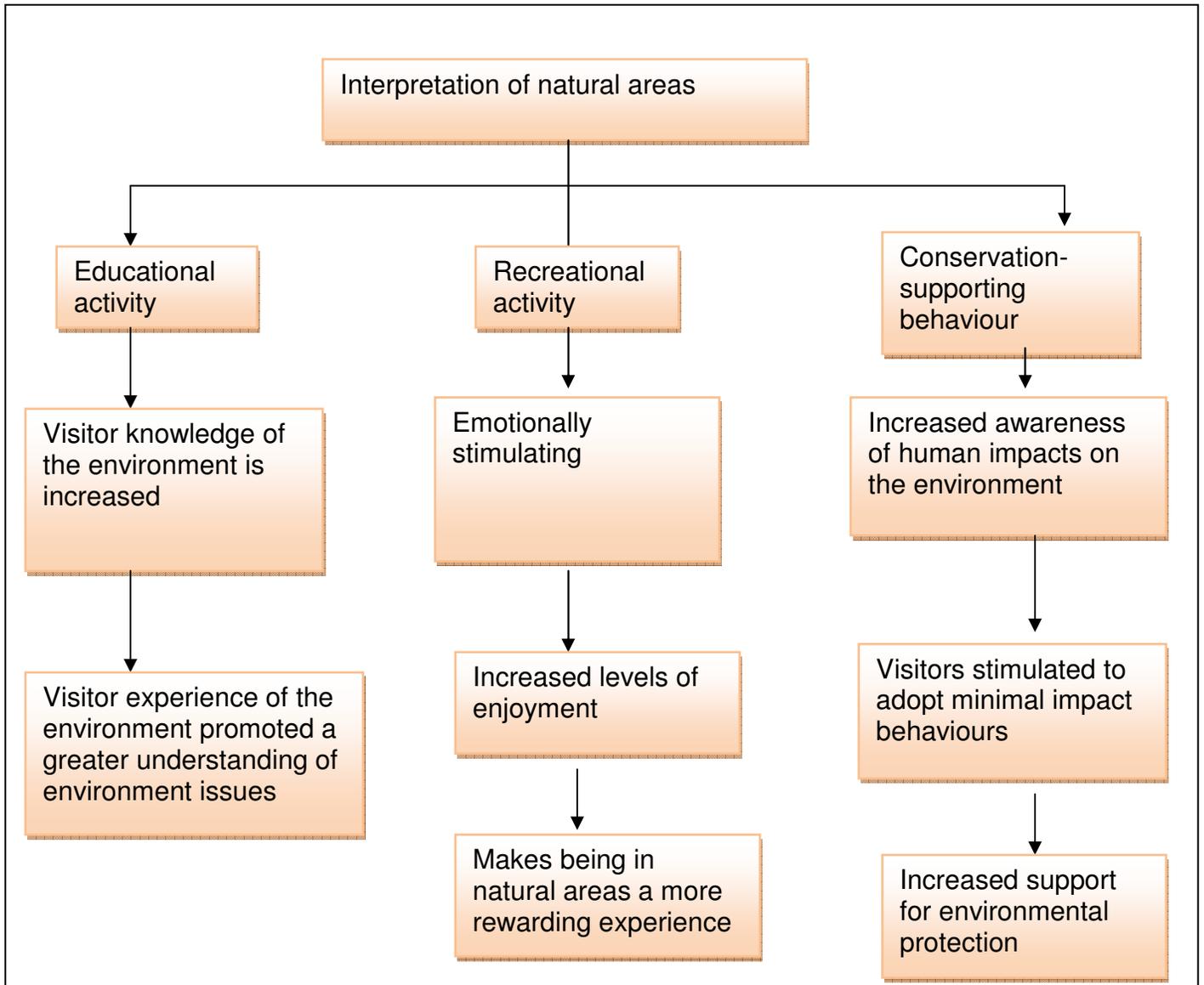
Since Tilden first published his definition in 1957, there have been many other people and organisations who have given their own definitions of interpretation in terms of its environmental and cultural focus. According to Ham (1992:3), environmental interpretation is about translating the technical language of natural science or a related field into terms and ideas that people who are not scientists can readily understand. This involves doing it in a way that is entertaining and interesting to these people.

Besides Ham's definition of interpretation, some other definitions emerged after Tilden's publication on interpretation (Littlefair, 2003:21):

- Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services - It is the process of stimulating and encouraging an appreciation of our natural and cultural heritage and communicating nature conservation ideals and practices.
- Interpretation Australia Association - It is a means of communicating ideas and feelings, which help people, and enrich their understanding and appreciation of their world and their role within it.
- Society for Interpreting Britain's Heritage - It is the process of explaining to people the significance of the place or object they have come to see, so that they enjoy their visit more, understand their heritage and environment better, and develop a more caring attitude towards conservation.

Additionally, Weiler and Davis (1993:93) define environmental interpretation as an educational, illustrative and entertaining activity which aims at providing the visitor, through first-hand experiences, with an insight into the interrelationships of the various resources and systems comprising the natural environment by first-hand experiences. Weiler and Davis's definition is in line with that of Newsome *et al.* (2002:239) who in their definition subdivided interpretation into an educational, a recreational, and a conservation supporting factor as shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: The education-knowledge-awareness relationship embodied in interpretation



Source: Newsome *et al.* (2002:240).

Newsome, *et al.*'s (2002) model depicts the aims of interpretation as it occurs in natural areas. These aims are educational, recreational and conservational, meaning that interpretation involves educating visitors about the place so that their environmental

knowledge is increased, but at the same time ensuring that their recreational purpose is realised, while recognising the importance of the environment and its conservation. The recreational activity impacts upon visitors' emotions. It also enhances their enjoyment of the whole experience, making it valuable and worthwhile to them.

The conservation aspect aims at helping visitors to become aware of the impact of humans on the environment and therefore encourages them to adopt positive behaviour with minimal impact on the environment. Conservation activities are expected to help visitors to develop an interest in issues of environment and in turn to support environmental conservation.

The description of interpretation as given in the model of Newsome *et al.* (2002) explains interpretation in the light of its mission and contribution towards sustainable tourism. Looking at this model, it is evident that their definition and description does not differ much from those of other authors who include outcomes such as "appreciation of natural and cultural heritage", "convey conservation messages", "caring attitude towards nature", "appreciation of the world". However, Newsome *et al.* (2002:240) integrate these key expected outcomes and actions into a model depicting the relationship between them.

Interpretation can thus be summarised as an activity that aims to communicate to tourists, in a recreational context, cultural, historical and natural/environmental messages, in order to assist them to develop empathy towards the environment as well as conservation values. Interpretation is done with the purpose of simplifying scientific and technical language for tourists and broadening their knowledge (cultural, historical and environmental), thereby enhancing their tourism experience.

2.3 AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON INTERPRETATION IN NATIONAL PARKS

According to Pond (1993:71) the concept and practice of interpretation is rooted in the mission of the United States National Park Service (NPS) itself. Its creators believed that there were certain places regarded as so magnificent or significant as to oblige one generation to preserve them for the enjoyment of those to follow. The goal of interpretation was not merely to provide information, but rather to convey the magnificence of a place, pass on its legacy, inspire visitors, and ultimately convince them of the need to preserve parklands (Pond, 1993: 70).

Many regard the field of interpretation as having received its most dramatic boost in 1957 with the publication of Freeman Tilden's (1883-1980) *Interpreting our heritage*, widely regarded as the classic philosophical work on the subject (Beck & Cable, 2002:2; Pond, 1993: 70; Project Coordinating Unit, 2005:3). This publication was the result of Freeman Tilden being funded by a grant from the Old Dominion Foundation to the National Park Service to study and document the vital role that interpretation plays in national parks (Brochu & Merriman, 2002:13). Freeman Tilden assembled the developing ideas and principles that existed and were debated at the time into a publication specifically about interpretation (McArthur & Hall, 1996:89). His influence and impact on the field of interpretation is still strongly felt today. The first explicit use of the term interpretation and discussion of its meaning was by Tilden (Orams, 1996:44). Many people regard him as the father of modern interpretation (Ward & Wilkinson, 2006: 7).

However, many people consider the following quotation from John Muir (who was also the founder of the Sierra Club)¹ as the earliest reference to interpretive communication: (Wolfe, in Brochu & Merriman, 2002:11):

¹ The Club is the oldest, largest, and most influential grassroots environmental organisation. It was founded on May 28, 1892. Its mission is to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sierra_Club).

I will interpret the rocks; learn the language of flood, storm and the avalanche. I will acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can.

Brochu and Merriman (2002:12) ascribe the commencement of the history of interpretation to Enos Mills (1870-1922), who was born in Fort Scott, Kansas, and started one of the first nature-guiding schools in the world. His nineteen books, which include the 1920 volume *Adventures of a nature guide*, provide a lasting legacy to the interpretative profession (Brochu & Merriman, 2002:12; Gross & Zimmerman, 2002:271) and it is in these books that most of his philosophical principles are presented (Beck & Cable, 2002:6; Gross & Zimmerman, 2002:271). Similarly, Beck and Cable (2002:6) are of the opinion that Mills was among the first to use the term “interpret” to describe his nature guiding at Long’s Peak in Colorado’s Rocky Mountains. McArthur & Hall (1996:89) confirm this view by stating that the initial flourish of the concept was largely stimulated by Mills, who worked as a nature guide between 1889 and 1922. According to Gross and Zimmerman (2002: 265), interpretation traces its origins back to John Muir and his protégé Enos Mills. Enos Mills is counted together with George Marsh, John Muir and Gifford Pinchot among those who “interpreted” the environment before the US National Parks were even created; they were regarded as naturalists and conservationists (Cho, 2005:26). Mills is considered one of the founders of the interpretive profession. His thoughts and observations regarding the profession still form the foundation of interpretive theory and practice today (Ward & Wilkinson, 2006:6).

Mills developed principles and techniques that laid the foundation for interpretation. He prompted guides to concentrate on inspiring visitors by communicating big ideas rather than masses of unrelated information. Mills was a keen advocate of monitoring visitors’ behaviour and responding accordingly (McArthur & Hall, 1996:89).

So the “profession” of interpretation began over a century ago, and it has undergone different forms and periods of growth in different countries. For much of the time the most influential developments occurred in the United States (McArthur & Hall, 1996:89).

Mills, Muir and Tilden are considered pioneers of interpretation, each of them with a unique contribution towards the origin and development of interpretation.

Sam Ham's name often appears in the discussion on the historical development of interpretation. He published *Environmental interpretation: A practical guide for people with big ideas and small budgets* in 1992. This has become one of the most respected texts in the interpretive field.

Over the years, the process of interpretation has become the field of many communicators such as the tour guide, ecotour guide, museum guide (usually called docents), zoo guide, adventure guide, interpreter, volunteer, and instructor. As discussed in Chapter 1 (1.6.1), these terms overlap greatly and vary from region to region, country to country, between public and private sectors and even within the travel industry (Cho, 2005:31). Presently the development of the interpretive philosophy and techniques involves not only guides working in natural areas, but also those in the cultural, artistic, historical and social arenas that make up the heritage of a place, region or country and are worth conserving for future generations (Project Coordinating Unit, 2005:4).

According to Staiff, Bushell & Kennedy (2002:109) the long history of interpretation in protected areas within the USA often provides the model of interpretation. Undoubtedly, Tilden's work in the 1950s continues to inform interpretation praxis. Interpretation forms the basis of the tourism experience in protected areas, as including both communication and education. Hence Mason (2003:144) indicates that it is conventional to discuss the presentation of information to visitors in a tourism context by using the term "interpretation".

2.4 INTERPRETATION IN NATURE-BASED TOURISM

The search for knowledge has been a driving force behind travel for over 3000 years (McArthur & Hall, 1996:89). In more recent times general interest tourism that involves learning while travelling is showing some growth, hence the popularity of guided tours (Eagles, McCool & Haynes, 2002:14). This interest in life-long educational pursuits, catered for by interpretation, has become an increasingly powerful motivator for travel (at local, national and international levels) and has fuelled a boom in the provision of ecotourism and/or cultural tourism experiences (Eagles, McCool & Haynes, 2002:14).

The primary purpose of national parks and other protected areas is the protection of natural and cultural values with tourism being a secondary purpose that supports both economic development and tourists' motivations such as recreation, spiritual refreshment, landscape appreciation and learning (Cochrane, 2006:10; Eagles, McCool & Haynes, 2002:23). The next section focuses on tourism in national parks with the aim of explaining the place of interpretation in tourism in the context of national parks.

2.4.1 Tourism in national parks

In modern as well as earlier forms of tourism the importance of the natural environment as an attraction in its own right, and as a setting in which tourism experiences take place, is recognised. The natural environment has been, and continues to be, an important component of the attractiveness of many destinations (Markwell & Weiler, 1998: 98) and national parks have played a significant role as tourist attractions in many countries (Butler & Boyd, 2000:3).

The term "national park" is always associated with nature-based tourism. In some countries, parks make up the major set of tourist attractions and form the foundation of small but often important tourism industries. Moreover, as the world develops and

technology binds us closer, an increasing number of people seek to visit “undisturbed” natural areas as a form of escape and recuperation (Lubbe, 2003:82).

Although little empirical evidence exists, there is reason to believe that transformation of environmental values and beliefs has resulted in increasing visits to quiet environments that offer an illusion of naturalness (Philipsen, 1995:193). What makes national parks even more attractive to ecotourists is the presence of exceptional features such as:

- Outstanding natural scenery;
- Exceptional representation of a particular biome;
- Rare or unusual flora and/or fauna; and
- Rare and/or unusual geological features (Lawton, 2001:290).

That is why for decades national parks have been among the most popular and frequently visited tourist attractions around the world. Each year, millions of domestic and international tourists visit national parks for various interests and reasons (Wang & Mike, 2002: 31; Deng, King & Bauer, 2002:423; Ryan & Dewar, 1995:295).

In Southern Africa national parks and nature reserves have become one of the most important draw cards for tourism and are thus a major source of foreign exchange (Ferreira, 2006:166).

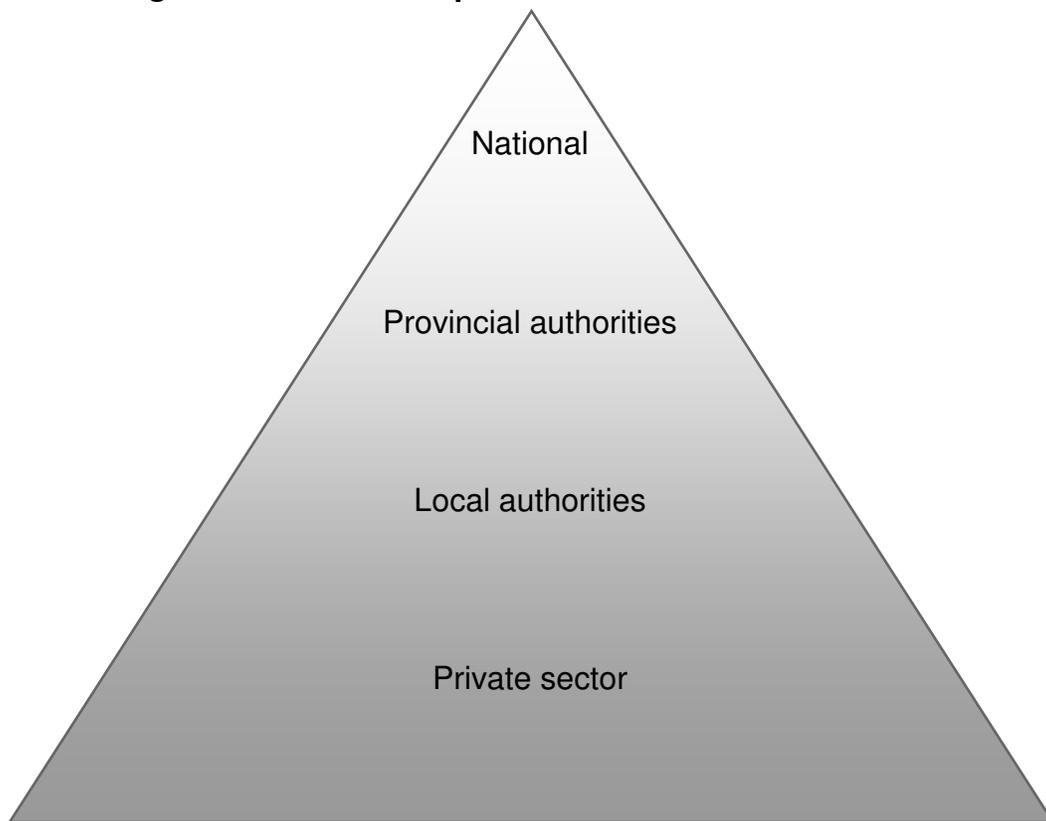
2.4.2 Tourism in South African national parks

In South Africa tourism in national parks is over three-quarters of a century old and has long been regarded as a mechanism to ensure the continued existence of conservation areas (Castley, Patton & Magome, 2009:403). South Africa has a well-established network of national parks (Kruger, 2004:3). The combination of natural and cultural features that are found in South Africa and specifically in the national parks has made South Africa one of the most popular ecotourism destinations in the world. Hence the

country receives tourists from both high income countries and the more affluent sectors of the domestic market (Naguran, 1999:39). Recent tourism statistics reveal that the total number of visitors to South Africa's national parks has increased substantially (Castley, Patton & Magome, 2009:403). Particularly in SANParks, the SANParks Annual Report of 2007/2008, revealed that the total number of visitors through SANParks gates had increased by 2.9 per cent from 4 587 815 in 2007 to 4 720 737 in 2008.

Parks and protected areas in South Africa can be divided into different categories, which are: national, provincial, local and private sector parks, as shown in the following diagram (Figure 2.2).

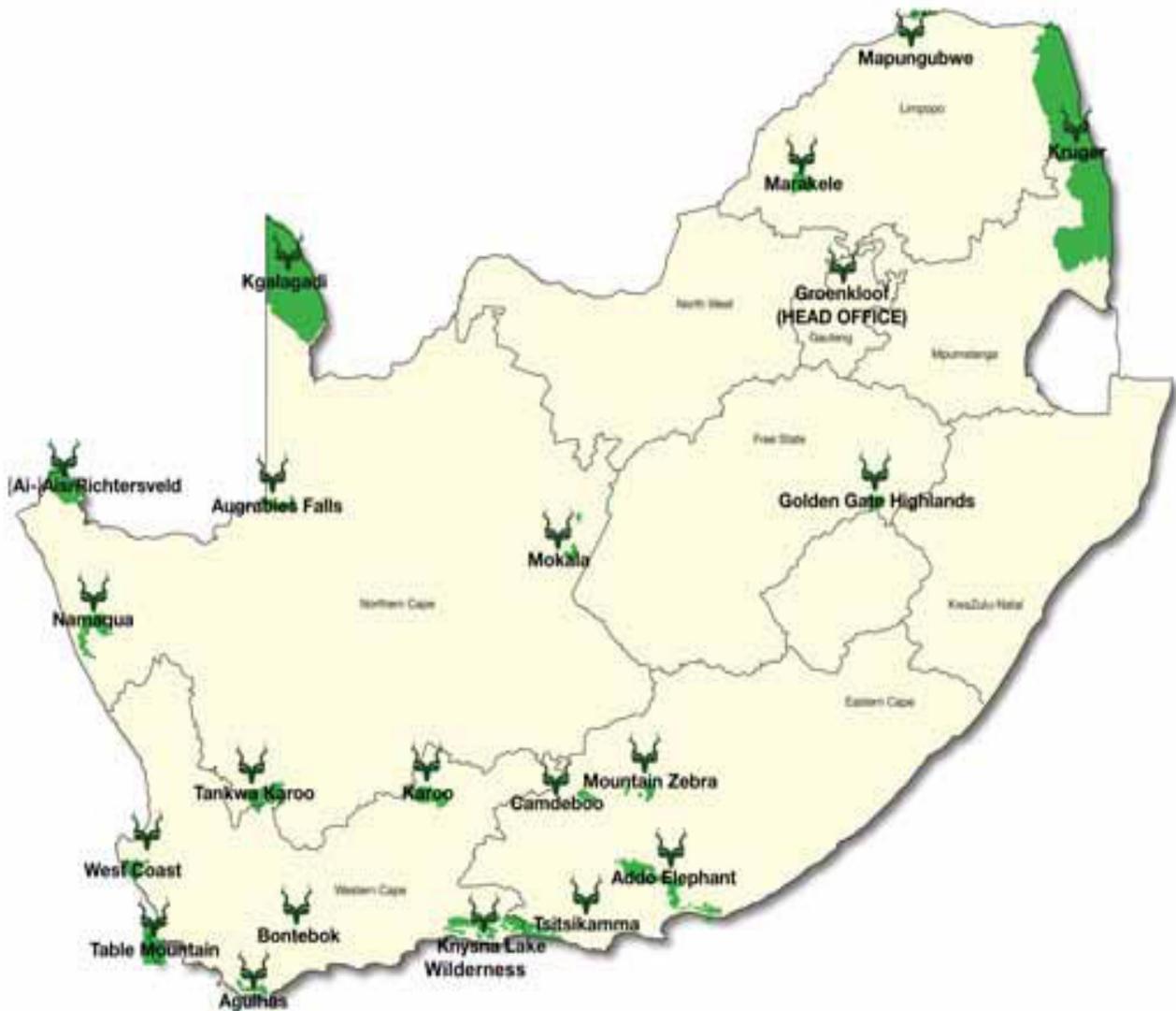
Figure 2.2: Categories and levels of parks in South Africa



Source: Myburgh & Saayman (1999:260).

At the top level in the diagram are the national parks. These are managed by what was called South African National Parks (SANP) and is now known as SANParks (the study site), a government-funded institution (Myburgh & Saayman, 1999:261). SANParks is a parastatal organisation that administers 22 parks, as shown in Figure 2.3 below.

Figure 2.3: Map showing national parks of SANParks



Source: SANParks Annual Report (2008).

Finances accruing from tourism revenue are re-circulated within the organisation, but the central government still subsidises some mainstream activities (Higgs, 2004:21). Examples of well known parks at national level include the Kruger National Park in the Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces, and Addo Elephant Park in the Eastern Cape Province (Myburgh & Saayman, 1999:261).

Following the category of national parks are those that are regarded as provincial parks, as most of the provinces in South Africa have their own reserves and parks which they manage. Pilanesberg and Madikwe are typical examples of provincial parks, and are managed by the North West Province. A number of local authorities have their own reserves, as shown at the third level, and at the lowest level of the pyramid are those that are privately owned (Myburgh & Saayman, 1999:261). There are thousands of private game reserves in South Africa, each with its own mix of wildlife conservation and tourism. These reserves tend to provide high-cost visitor services, while leaving the more inexpensive operations to the national and provincial park services (Eagles, McCool & Haynes, 2002:37).

Although the primary purpose of national parks and other protected areas is to protect natural and cultural resources and values, a secondary purpose is often tourism, encompassing both economic development and tourists' motivations such as recreation, spiritual refreshment, landscape appreciation and learning (Cochrane, 2006:10) as explained in the other sections of this thesis. All national parks and protected areas in South Africa allow some level of visitor use for tourism purposes. This can vary from just a few to millions of visitors per year (Reinius & Fredman, 2007:35) and it is worth mentioning that most national parks have become popular tourist attractions for both domestic and international tourists. The combination of natural and cultural features that are abundant in South Africa has made South Africa one of the most popular ecotourism destinations in the world. Specifically as regards the cultural heritage aspect of tourism, 37% of international tourism is culturally motivated, and the demand is estimated to be growing at 15% annually (World Tourism Organisation, in Richards,

2009:9). In support of this, a Conservation International and National Geographic Traveller 2004 press release (in Pinter, 2005:9), indicates that 700 million people travel internationally each year while supporting the heritage tourism industry. By the year 2020, the number is expected to approach 1.4 billion. Veverka (2000:8) asserts that interpretation of the site's story and message is the main reason visitors go to heritage sites, and a key element in the development of any heritage tourism site. This means that sites where cultural interpretation is provided can never reach their true success potential without having relevant interpretive plans, programmes, services, media, and staff for the site (Veverka, 2000:8). Interpretive programmes and services can help increase site visitation, increase repeat visitation, increase and improve community support, and bring a variety of other benefits to the heritage sites through the use of this powerful communication strategy (Veverka, 2000:8). McDonnell (2001) asserts that interpretation of information can give tourists new insights and understandings of the culture of the area they visit. To use the contemporary jargon of the media, according to McDonnell (2001), tour guides are the "spin-doctors" of tourism, as it is through their interpretation of facts that tourists form impressions and understanding of the host culture. For example, World Heritage Sites should have information available about the significance and (if relevant) the chronological development of the site in a format that can be understood in different languages. According to Shackley (1998:7), this is almost never done, and most World Heritage Sites, particularly those in developing countries or where tourism and visitor management policies are poorly developed, have a very basic level of on-site interpretation (or none at all).

The global trend that identifies tourists as being interested in local culture is now an established part of the South African tourist equation. When one looks at South Africa before the first democratic elections of 1994, the statistics show that 30% of visitors came to South Africa for its scenic beauty while 26 per cent came for the wildlife. After 1994, 27% came to see the "new South Africa" and the number of tourists coming with a cultural or socio-cultural motivation had risen to 46% (Lubbe, 2003:96). Thus, domestic and international tourism is viewed as being among the foremost vehicles for cultural exchange, providing a personal experience, not only of that which has survived from the

past, but of the contemporary life and society of others. The growth in cultural tourism has also led to a number of people producing cultural products and experiences for cultural tourism consumption. The cultural tourist now has a dazzling array of old and new attractions to choose from, all vying to provide a “unique” cultural experience for this growing market. Tourists’ interest in cultural heritage in SANParks is evident in Mapungubwe National Park and World Heritage Site, which sold 4 348 beds within a year (the twelve months ending on 31 March 2008), an increase over the previous year, when 3 657 beds were sold (SANParks, 2008). Presently, interpretive visitor centres are being built inside Mapungubwe National Park (Carruthers, 2006:3).

The interest of tourists in visiting national parks in South Africa has meant that national parks have to ensure that they offer a competitive tourism product to guarantee their continued existence, while still meeting conservation and social objectives. Some of the approaches which SANParks has used to enhance tourism competitiveness are to diversify the tourism product. Product diversification meant the unbundling of rigid and restrictive rules that limited the ability of the visitor to interact with the park environment, hence the introduction of activities in some parks such as guided drives at various times of the night and day and guided walks into wilderness areas (Castley, Patton, & Magome, 2009:403). The opening up of such guided activities calls for the intensification of face-to-face interpretation by ecotour guides as a way of minimising the tourists’ impact on the environment while enhancing their experience of the national park, and therefore enhances the need for an interpretation model in order to guide and ensure quality.

In SANParks (SANParks, 2008:3), the view is held that guided activities contribute to the objectives of enhancing SANParks’ reputation by:

- Creating a unique, holistic and meaningful tourists’ experience; and
- Developing awareness of ecology, natural wonders and cultural heritage.

The following section briefly expands on how interpretation fits into the national parks as a strategy to enhance the quality of the experience for tourists and as a tool that can

assist in the management of visitors and their environmental impact in the national parks.

2.4.3 The management of visitors and their environmental impact

Tourists are sometimes identified as causing destruction (Deng, King & Bauer, 2002:423). Destinations are under increasing pressure of environmental degradation, natural resource depletion and species extinction as a result of the development of tourism (Staiff *et al.* 2002:97; Butler & Boyd, 2000:3). Some authors such as Deng, King and Bauer (2002:423) are of the view that part of the destruction is specifically caused by tourists. This continually causes considerable anxiety to protected area managers and conservation agencies, which makes the relationship between tourism and protected areas difficult (Staiff *et al.*, 2002:97; Butler & Boyd, 2000:3). For instance, protected area managers face a difficult task in balancing the need for conservation of the resource with their secondary directive of allowing access and opportunities for recreation (Black & Crabtree, 2007:144; Marion & Reid, 2007:5; Mason, 2003:110). According to Burton (1995:102) widespread impacts caused by the presence of tourists themselves include the following:

- Impacts on soil and water from chemical pollution (e.g. from oil, soap) and added substances (from faeces, urine, fire ashes, food waste): These impacts may be spread (in water) beyond the immediate site of tourist activity but are generally greatest at tourist sites (e.g. campsites, trails, etc.).
- The most widespread and, ecologically potentially the most serious impact, is the possible introduction of non-native weed species and pests into an untouched ecosystem (e.g. on tyres, boots, in horse/pack animal dung and feed, etc.). These can spread throughout the ecosystem far beyond the sites to which tourists have access, and may have major ecological effects.
- Fires – tourists can start wildfires that can have widespread devastating effects.
- Impacts on the behaviour of animals and birds – the presence of people can disturb animals' feeding and breeding behaviour. Persistent disturbance could possibly threaten the viability of an animal or bird population.

- Trampling by human feet can kill vegetation, cause soil compaction and/or soil erosion (and kill corals in the marine environment).

Consequently, there is often frequent and vocal opposition to the continuance, and particularly the expansion, of tourism (Butler & Boyd, 2000:3) in protected areas. Kuo (2002:87) is of the view that the concept of sound tourism development and management postulates that the potential conflicts between tourism activities and resource protection can be resolved by maintaining a balance between the needs of resources and visitors. Therefore the management of visitor activities is just as important as the management of resources, and that is where interpretation fits in as one of the intervention strategies. It is one of the management tools that endeavours to minimise environmental impacts of eco-tourists (Skanavis & Giannoulis, 2010:50).

A major impact on environmental awareness strategies has been made by the development of interpretive programmes based in parks and protected areas (Ham, Sutherland and Meganck, 1993:232), because educating tourists is seen as a major mechanism for managing protected areas (Lück, 2003:945). The effective use of interpretation as a management tool has become an important topic for protected area managers and tourism operators dependent on natural areas such as nature parks and cultural sites for tourism (Littlefair, 2003:6; Mason & Christie, 2003:26). Such interpretive communication strategies can contribute to visitor management by influencing where visitors go, informing visitors about appropriate behaviours, and developing visitors' concern (Finucane & Dowling, 1995:17; Mason, 2003:110; Moscardo, 1999:14; Skanavis & Giannoulis, 2010:50). Thus, it is essential to design the interpretive experiences in such a way that they challenge and/or extend visitors' existing environmental conceptions (Ballantyne, Parker & Beckmann, 1998:15).

McArthur and Hall (1996:104) are of the opinion that high-quality interpretation can directly and indirectly increase the effectiveness and accountability of heritage management. Direct outcomes can be achieved by influencing visitor decisions and behaviour while at the heritage site. Indirect outcomes can be achieved by presenting

different values and issues for further thought and discussion. For instance, the overriding message of the study conducted by Stewart, Hayward and Devlin (1998:265), to interpretative planners, providers and researchers, was that if interpretation is well executed, it could have a cumulative effect of encouraging the desired development of empathy for conservation, heritage, culture and landscape. Marion and Reid (2007:23) wrote a research paper to assess the efficacy of low impact visitor education based on a review of existing research in a recreational setting. They concluded that most studies found that educational interventions were effective in increasing visitor knowledge and altering visitor behaviours.

The overall results of the study conducted by Tubb (2003:477) suggest that interpretation, if carefully designed, is capable of contributing to the goals of sustainable tourism development by achieving restructuring of knowledge and the resulting behavioural intentions of visitors (Tubb, 2003:477). Tubb (2003:477) found that interpretation added to visitors' knowledge of the site and that this increase in knowledge encouraged visitors to see how they could change their behaviour to be more respectful of the environment. This indicates that there is indeed scope for interpretation to help modify the behaviour of tourists through increased knowledge and awareness (Ham & Krumpe, 1996; Littlefair, 2003:28; Tubb, 2003:477). When used effectively, interpretation can be persuasive. It can prompt people to make changes in their thinking and behaviour (Youngentob & Hostetler, 2005). The success of the tour guides' interaction depends on how the guides communicate with the tourists, and that calls for communication competency of tour guides.

The role of interpretation in educating the tourists in nature-based tourism for the conservation and management of natural heritage is not the only driving force for the development of effective interpretation in protected areas. Another such driving force is the visitors' interest in interpretation to enhance their experience and satisfaction (Skanavis & Giannoulis, 2010:50), this is explained in the following section.

2.4.4 Enhancing tourists' experience/satisfaction in nature-based tourism through interpretation

Providing information and alternative options; providing information to encourage safety and comfort; and creating the actual experience are the three main ways that interpretation can contribute to the quality of visitors' experience (Moscardo, 1999:8).

Tourists are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their demands. Their sophistication is not only concerned with the luxuriousness of the various establishments they use, but is based especially on having a meaningful experience which incorporates, among other things, learning and understanding about flora and fauna, ecosystems and nature in general, as well as its conservation, and the role of the visitor (Eagles, McCool & Haynes, 2002:109). This interest in learning calls for greater emphasis to be placed on communication and interpretation as integral parts of visitor experience available at various tourists sites (Moscardo, 1999:11), including national parks.

It is frequently assumed that those who visit national parks are ecotourists. This calls for more research to ascertain if a majority of national parks' visitors really are ecotourists, who go to national parks to experience various elements of nature and scenery. Also prominent are ecotourists who are interested in learning from exposure to local cultures (Wight, 2001:96). The demands for learning by tourists are evident in the results of the study that was conducted by Chin, Moore, Wallington and Dowling (2000:31) in Bako National Park (Borneo) which showed that 90% of the respondents (tourists) were interested in learning about nature.

Actually, many of those who work in the government-sponsored national parks are of the view that the educative component of the visitor experience still represents a primary motivation for their work as interpreters, and indeed as custodians, of a country's culture (Ryan & Dewar, 1995:295; Wearing, Archer, Moscardo & Schweinsberg, 2007:13).

However, with regard to education in national parks, Pearce (2005:174) raises a concern about the fact that assessment of travellers in this realm is quite limited. He goes on to wonder how much travellers learn about the environments and the cultures they visit.

Variety in the types of tourists that visit national parks is evident from the research that was conducted by Cochrane (2006:12). Cochrane (2006:12) identified “elite”, “backpacker plus” and “mass” as some types of international tourists who visit national parks. In analysing preferences for experiences, Cochrane (2006:12) found that “elites” are interested in good communication; the “backpacker plus” genuinely desire to learn about culture and nature, and require good information; and the “mass” like superficial aspects of local culture and enjoy natural scenery and wildlife if easy to see.

It is evident in Cochrane’s (2006:12) findings that communication and interpretation form an essential component in national parks in satisfying tourists’ needs and expectations, although the ability of parks to satisfy tourists’ needs through fulfilling their needs and expectations is still debatable. One of the reasons is that measurement of satisfaction has been difficult and controversial in the recreation research literature, and has raised a number of questions (McCool, 2006:5). In particular Ham (2002:5) suggests that the question of how interpretation can best contribute to enriching their experience is complex.

It is worth noting Ham and Weiler’s assertion (2007:6) that previous research on tourist satisfaction indicated that tourists’ experiences and levels of satisfaction have been found to vary with their background characteristics, such as their own past travel experience and background knowledge. Tourists’ countries of origin, nationality, and culture have also been associated with differences in satisfaction levels.

Despite these concerns, some research has shown that there is a link between the quality of guiding and tourist satisfaction (Weiler & Ham, 2001:551) and some have gone further to recognise the role that interpretation plays in the tourists’ experience

(Armstrong & Weiler, 2002; Beck & Cable, 1998; Lew, Hall & Timothy, 2008:21; Weiler & Ham, 2001). These studies have shown that useful and timely information is central to any visitors' experience, and has a determining effect on their degree of satisfaction (Ham, 2002:5).

There is little research that has been conducted to directly document or precisely quantify the influence that the interpretive dimensions of the experience have on tourist satisfaction (Ham & Weiler, 2007:5). Griffin and Vacaflores (2004:33) found that one of the specific factors that had been identified as major factors influencing the quality of visitor experience was interpretation. Therefore, enhancing the visitor experience may be the primary and most important goal of interpretation in the tourism situation (Ham, Housego & Weiler, 2005:7). From the visitors' perspective, interpretation is a means of adding value to their experience because most sights become a bit more interesting when one knows a little more about them (Wearing & Neil, 1999:58).

Very little research has been undertaken on visitor satisfaction in less developed countries, and given the apparent differences in sociodemographic characteristics and levels of travel experience; there is a conspicuous gap with regard to comparisons between international and domestic tourists in these countries. Also, there does not appear to be any published research exploring differences in satisfaction with interpretive versus non-interpretive elements of the experience in the context of protected areas in less developed countries (Weiler & Ham, 2004:3).

An examination of the impact of interpretive signs on visitor knowledge at the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk in Western Australia found significant increases in visitor knowledge and satisfaction as a result of reading trail-side signs (Hughes & Morrison-Saunders, 2002). Research conducted by Moscardo (1998:5) in the Skyrail Rainforest Cableway (in Australia), to find out if visitors were more satisfied with the Skyrail experience because of the interpretation, indicated that visitors who experienced any of the three interpretive components were significantly more satisfied with their experience than those who simply rode on the cableway.

In summarising the value of interpretation in nature-based tourism, Wearing and Neil (1999:62-67), highlight four key areas of potential benefits. These are promotional, recreational, educational and management/conservation benefits, as shown in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Potential benefits of interpretation

Promotional benefits	Explanation of benefits
Diversity of subjects that can be promoted.	Interpretation can promote values, sites, land tenures, management objectives and practices, and the corporate mission of the managing authority.
A subtle and sophisticated form of promotion.	Interpretation can weave promotion into a story without making it sound too promotional and self-centred.
Added dimensions for follow-on promotion.	Interpretation can provide on-going advisory services to reinforce and expand initial ideas.
The recreational benefits of interpretation	Explanation benefits
Value added to the visitor experience.	Interpretation is an added activity to those typically expected. For example, interpretation signs enhance a walking track just as interpretive guides are preferred over one that merely points out significant attractions as they come into view.
Making the experience more enjoyable.	Interpretation that is stimulating and connects with emotions tends to make the experience more enjoyable.
Enhance a sense of meaning to recreational activity.	Interpretation provides a greater sense of meaning to activities such as sightseeing.
The educational benefits of interpretation	Explanation of benefits
Opportunity for learning.	Interpretation generates learning experiences for visitors that increase their knowledge and understanding of the environment.
Opportunity for self-discovery.	Interpretation generates experiences for visitors to gain a clearer understanding of their role within their environment, and this aids in self-discovery and self-actualization.
Conservation and protected area management benefits of interpretation.	Explanation of benefits
Stimulation of an environmental consciousness and broad-based conservation ethic.	Interpretation stimulates thoughts of personal responsibility for using resources and contributes to improvements in quality of life.
Raise awareness of regulations and codes designed to minimise impacts.	Interpretation programmes such as minimal impact campaigns can subtly present requirements for changed visitor behaviour in a way that is non-confrontational.
Stimulation of behavioural change to minimise personal impacts upon the environment.	Interpretation presents ideas for people to adopt.
Support for protected areas.	Interpretation presents the value of protected areas from a range of perspectives.
Support for protected area management organisations.	Interpretation presents the challenges for management in a candid way that exposes the constraints facing protected area management agencies.

Source: Wearing and Neil (1999:62-67).

To conclude this section, it is important to reiterate that an ecotour guide's ability to interpret appropriately and effectively is crucial. The next paragraph (2.5) deals with the interpretive roles of tour guides in national parks.

2.5 INTERPRETIVE ROLES OF TOUR GUIDES IN NATIONAL PARKS

Guiding ranks among the world's oldest professions because of the early excursions that had to be undertaken many thousands of years ago, not necessarily for pleasure but out of necessity, such as to gather food, or escape harsh weather. Travellers at the time needed a guide just to offer geographic direction. Later, enterprising travelling traders (circa 5000 BC) also needed guides for safety against thieves (Pond, 1993:2; Queiros, 2003b). Eventually, in the classical era (from 2000 BC) travel for pleasure started to become popular (Queiros, 2003b:13).

Guiding is an important sector of the tourism system and tour guides play a special role in the tourism industry (Hu, 2007:18) as key front-line players (Ap & Wong, 2001; Weaver, 2006:186). Their position and role in the industry make them indispensable, because they work for supply-side stakeholders (such as attractions, travel operators/agents, governments, public organisations, private corporations, or for themselves independently), within all sectors of the tourism industry, and are at the same time linked to the demand side (tourists) (Hu, 2007:18). Hence Weaver (2006:186) describes tour guiding as a facilitating tourism sector.

The tour guide's role has been the focus of scholarly discussion and analysis for several years (Ham & Weiler, 2005:31). According to Weiler and Davis (1993:91); Ham and Weiler (2005:31) and Pond (1993:67), Cohen's (1985) model is often cited as a basis for examining the roles of the tour guide. Cohen (1985:7) recognised and analysed the traditional roles of guides, labelling these roles as "pathfinding" and "mentoring", applicable to all tour guides.

As pathfinders, tour guides select the route and the attractions and make them accessible to tourists. They typically point out objects of interest without giving elaborate explanations. Hence Cohen (1985:7) further indicates that pathfinders lead geographically through an unknown environment and also lead socially, in a setting which followers (visitors) do not have access to without them. As mentors, tourist guides become personal tutors and even spiritual advisors.

In his further analysis of the role of tour guides Cohen (1985) renamed these two roles and called the pathfinder role the “leadership sphere” and the mentor role the “mediatory sphere”, to be more relevant to modern guiding. The leadership role, as one of the principal components of the guide’s role, involves being instrumental in ensuring that the tour is completed without problems (smoothly) through directing, accessing and controlling during the tour. The social component in the leadership sphere entails ensuring that tension during the tour is well managed, there is integration in a group and visitors are kept in high morale and are assisted to understand the activities (animation) (Cohen, 1985:14). The mediatory sphere, as one of the principal components of the guide’s role, involves an interactional component and a communicative component (Cohen, 1985:15). The interactional component refers to the function of a tour guide as a middleman between his or her party and the local population, sites and tourists’ facilities. The communicative component refers to the guides’ role of communicating destination-related information to tourists (Huang, Hsu & Chan, 2010:6).

Cohen (1985) further differentiated guides’ responsibilities within each of these spheres and came out with “inner-directed” and “outer-directed” responsibilities of guides (figure 2.4). The inner-directed role has to do with the guides’ accountability within the group (i.e. to facilitate learning and enjoyment of individual tourists and to nurture and manage interaction between them), and the outer-directed role involves using resources outside the tour group to satisfy the tourists’ needs (i.e. facilitate and mediate interaction between tourists and host communities). Cohen (1985) explained these roles by using a 2x2 matrix (Cohen, 1985:9-10) as indicated in figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4: A schematic representation of the principal components of the tourist guide's role

	Outer-directed	Inner-directed
(A) Leadership sphere	(1) Instrumental	(2) Social
(B) Mediatory sphere	(3) Interactional	(4) Communicative

Source: Cohen (1985:10).

However, Weiler and Davis (1993: 97) updated Cohen's model of the main components of the tourist guide's role (leadership and mediatory) by adding environmental responsibility as part of the guide's role in nature-based tourism, as shown in Figure 2.5.

In modifying Cohen's model (1985), Weiler and Davis (1993:93) included resource management as a third focus, with the understanding that tour guides in ecotourism need to focus on the environment as one of their roles. Resource management as a focus entails that a guide should be a motivator, meaning that a guide has to influence the tourists' behaviour. Inclusion of resource management also entails that the role of a tour guide is to interpret the environment. Being an environmental interpreter (which is the focus of this thesis) involves increasing the tourists' appreciation and understanding of the environment. The tour management, experience management and resource management dimensions are useful additions to the literature to help explain the roles of the guide in the nature-based tourism industry (Black, 2007:318).

Figure 2.5: Guide’s role: Environmental interpreter

	OUTER-DIRECTED (Resource from outside the tour group)	INNER-DIRECTED (Resource from inside the tour group)
Tour Management (focus on group)	‘organiser’	‘entertainer’
Experience Management (focus on individual)	‘group leader’	‘teacher’
Resource Management (focus on environment)	‘motivator’	‘environmental interpreter’

Source: Weiler and Davis (1993: 97).

Ecotour guides are therefore expected to play the third role that is, being interpreters. They are expected to communicate and interpret the significance of the environment, promote minimal impact practices, ensure the sustainability of the natural and cultural environment, and motivate those tourists to consider their own lives in relation to larger ecological or cultural concerns (Black, Ham & Weiler, 2001:149). The importance of this interpretive role is also seen in a review by Black and Weiler (2005:26) of some of the key published literature focussing on the roles of tour guides. All twelve of the studies reviewed, identified the role of interpreter.

In South Africa, it is believed that guides can play a significant educational role with reference to the awareness, protection, conservation and promoting of tourism (Smal, 1997:7). In SANParks, one of the key tourism objectives is to develop and grow a sustainable nature-based tourism business (SANParks, 2008:13). The emphasis on sustainability means protection and conservation of responsible and sustainable tourism in SANParks’ tourism ventures and activities. This undoubtedly guides all the tourism

activities in SANParks, including personal interpretation or guided interpretation (as in game drives), and non-personal interpretation or self-guided interpretation (as at visitor centres, displays and exhibits, publications and self-guided trails). It is important to state that great progress has been made by the People and Conservation (P&C) division of SANParks in the area of environmental education and youth development through the implementation of various programmes (SANParks, 2008:34).

The success of the tour guides' interaction depends on how tour guides communicate with the tourists, and that calls for the guides to have communication competency.

2.6 COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY OF TOUR GUIDES

As it has been said in the previous sections, interpretation in national parks is an approach to conservation communication, and is therefore about the need to communicate technical information to non-technical audiences (tourists) (Manohar, Noor Azlin, Azyyati & Azman (2005:6). The emphasis on communication means that communication competency of tour guides is essential if the guides are to carry out their duties effectively in national parks. Competency refers to possession of the required skills and knowledge necessary to perform the task (Goh, 2008:12). Communication competency is essential for the interaction of guides and tourists in nature-based tourism because of the transfer of information that can serve the important purposes of persuasion, education, resource protection strategies, entertainment and safety (Osshell, 2009:8). Communication competence is also important in retaining the interest of tourists and reinforcing predispositions not to stray from marked paths (Ryan & Dewar, 1995:301), and also for visitors to be well informed and satisfied (Rabotić, 2010).

The understanding of the basic of communication by the guides can maximise the retention, comprehension, and understanding of the messages to tourists in a nature-based setting. As suggested in paragraph 2.2 communication begins with a communicator (interpreter). The message is the second step in the communication

process and the interpreter then translates (third step) the message into appropriate language or communication medium. After the actual communication of the message, the visitor then receives the message (fourth step) and filters it (fifth step). After filtering, there is a feedback process (sixth step) for communication back to the interpreter (Ward & Wilkinson, 2006:32). All these processes are important in communication. Also important during the process is the message content, personal style and delivery. These are all the characteristics that have an impact on the visitor's perceptions of the guide's credibility (Ward & Wilkinson, 2006:35).

To conclude this section, it is important to highlight that tour guiding is complex, and the complexity varies depending on the environment, topic and type of tour conducted. In interpretive guiding such as in nature-based tourism, the complexity is as a result of the emphasis on the key role of tour guides' communication skills for effective interpretation. That is why there have been a number of authors who have provided conceptual models for effective interpretation (Wearing *et al.* 2008:5) such as Moscardo (1999); Ham (1992) and Veverka (2005). For instance Veverka's (2005) model of interpretation shows how the total communication process works, and becomes the basis for developing a philosophy and strategy for interpretive planning. According to Veverka (2005) the following are components of interpretive communication:

- The message - What message is conveyed to the tourist?
- Specific objectives - What are these messages aiming to fulfil? That involves the interpretive techniques that can be used to present the messages.
- Visitor analysis -The understanding of how visitors learn (involves visitor analysis).
- Managerial realities - What are the implementation and operational considerations which may have some influence on interpretive programme (e.g. costs, staff needs and material needs)?
- Agency policies and goals for interpretation.
- Programme or service demands from the public.
- Management issues.
- Available budget for programmes or services.

- Political pressures for certain programmes.

Veverka's (2005) model clearly brings out the interdependence of many components for the success of interpretation, some of which are realised and discussed in this study, such as interpretive techniques, staff needs (which could be continuing education and training, tourists' needs and interests and the organisation's policies).

This study builds on the EROT model of interpretive communication by Ham (1992) as its conceptual foundation. The motivation for using this model has already been given in Chapter 1 (refer to 1.3).

2.7 THE CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION: EROT MODEL OF INTERPRETIVE COMMUNICATION

There are a number of qualities that have been identified and recognised in the literature on effective interpretation (Davidson & Black, 2007; Ham,1992; Ham,2003; McArthur & Hall, 1996; Moscardo,1999; Wearing & Neil, 1999; Weiler & Ham, 2001; Tilden, 1977:9), and these qualities have also been used as the framework upon which interpretive activities can be built (Kuo, 2002:99). The aim of this section is to explain Ham's EROT model of interpretive communication, as referred to in paragraph 1.3, and the suggested activities that are built into it. Ham (1992) suggests that effective interpretive communication must be Enjoyable, Relevant, well Organised and have a Theme.

2.7.1 Interpretation must be enjoyable

Tourists expect to be entertained during interpretation. One of the crucial qualities of interpretation is entertainment, even if this is not necessarily interpretation's main goal. It should always be remembered that tourists are non-captive (audiences who, if not entertained, could easily "switch their minds off", away from the interpretive experience

(Ham, 1992:8; Weiler & Ham 2001:555). Captive audiences are part of the formal setting in an interpretive activity. Ecotour guides have to make sure that they use strategies that will make tourists “have fun”. One way of doing this is to provide varied experiences during interpretation.

Ecotour guides in national parks should provide varied experiences during interpretation because interpretation entails active involvement and the engagement of first-hand experiences. Getting actively involved, and “doing” rather than just passively listening to straightforward instruction, makes the interpretive activity easier to appreciate and more enjoyable. The inclusion of a variety of experiences helps to attract and maintain tourists’ attention (Griffin & Vacaflores, 2004:38). Providing varied experiences is a way to personalise and give visitors a sense of control over the experience. This is because human beings have a tendency to pay attention to differences and change in an environment rather than to monotonous experiences. Repetition makes visitors quickly lose attention, and without attention it is difficult to create successful communication (Moscardo, 1998:8).

It is important for ecotour guides to use clear explanations, humour, analogies, metaphors, give opportunities to ask questions, encourage participation and interaction amongst tourists, encourage use of the five senses, and provide variety (Griffin & Vacaflores, 2004:38; Moscardo, 1998:8; Reisinger & Steiner, 2006:487). Humour is always an effective tool which is happily received by tourists. It is generally known that it is not easy to transmit great ideas in a jovial manner, but it is advisable for the guide to use humour, at least on a small scale and with subtlety (Project Coordinating Unit, 2005:8). Encouraging the use of the senses is an approach that is likely to bring the interpretive experience “alive” and make it more enjoyable and satisfying. This can be done by providing opportunities for visitors to make use of hearing, touch, smell and taste (Armstrong & Weiler, 2003:28; Markwell & Weiler, 1998:106). For example, the visitors may be invited to listen to birdsong or the sound of a stream (Project Coordinating Unit, 2005:7).

2.7.2 Interpretation must be relevant

For interpretation to be relevant, it is essential for ecotour guides to present information that is meaningful and personal to the tourists. When information is meaningful, tourists are able to make a connection with what they already know, and they relate to what they know and care about. It is easy for tourists to ignore information that seems unimportant to them, even if they understood it well (Ham, 1992:13).

Griffin and Vacaflores (2004:37) and Moscardo (1999:69) confirm this by stating that research shows that people can only assimilate new information if they can relate it to something they already know. They believe that the use of analogies and metaphors, comparisons, simple explanations, personification, anecdotes, self-referencing, skilful questioning, labelling and even humour are all effective means of making interpretation more relevant and meaningful to the individual. This helps to bridge the gap between the familiar and the unfamiliar. For instance, visitors generally like to learn about a particular area or wildlife situation and develop some understanding of how it relates to them. They are also interested to learn why natural environments are important and what human beings could do to preserve what still exists (Newsome *et al.*, 2002:240-244).

Tourists pay special attention to those things that the guide relates to their areas of interest and personalities (Weiler & Ham, 2001:554). The result of the study conducted by Ham and Weiler (2005:41) also indicated that low-quality guiding, from the passenger's perspective, occurs when the guide, among others things, fails to make the information he or she presents relevant to the passengers.

2.7.3 Interpretation must be well organised

Information should be presented in such a way that is easy to follow. A tourist who is seeking pleasure (non-captive) will switch attention if he/she has to work too hard to follow a train of thought (Ham, 1992:19; Weiler & Ham, 2001:555). Therefore,

interpretation by ecotour guides in national parks should be presented in a way that is easy to follow (Ham, 1992:19). For interpretation to be effective, it should be presented in such a way that information is made clear, and in a logical manner that flows from a well-structured introduction to the body and conclusion (Griffin & Vacaflores, 2004:38).

2.7.4 Interpretation must have a theme

Using a theme is one of the methods most commonly put forward as critical to effective interpretation (Moscardo, 1999; Ham, 1992). Themes provide both an organisational framework and a foundation for visitors' understanding of knowledge and recall of information. Visitors are able to follow a presentation that is thematic and enhances their attention. It is therefore important that tourist guides present interpretation that has a theme. The theme should be specific, attractive, stimulate interest and maintain visitors' attention, and should enable visitors to make connections to their own experience (Griffin & Vacaflores, 2004:38).

Interpretation is thematic if it has a major point. A theme is different from a topic. The difference is that the topic is merely the subject matter of the presentation, whereas the theme is the main point or message that a communicator is trying to convey about that topic. A theme is a whole idea, an inference or connection that the mind makes, and is usually expressed in one sentence (Ham, 2003:5; Ham, 1992:21). It is the way to express the essence of the message that should be imparted to the visitors (Ham, Housego & Weiler, 2005:13; Weiler and Ham, 2002:556).

There is an understanding that visitors forget most or all of the facts presented to them. But if the conclusion they draw from all the facts is meaningful and important, it will provoke them to thought and they will continue to think about that conclusion even when the facts that supported it are long gone from their memories. Therefore in thematic interpretation it is the thinking that matters most, not the facts. Thinking is what leads the visitor to attach meanings to the thing and the place being interpreted (Ham, Housego & Weiler, 2005:4).

In the study conducted by Armstrong and Weiler (2003) among 20 sampled tour operators in Victorian National Parks in Australia, it was found that some operations were exemplary in terms of Ham's EROT model (enjoyment, relevancy, organisation and a theme) while others were not. The results of their study indicated that many guides were successful at gaining and maintaining their audiences' attention and managed to convey technical material. These guides used interactivity successfully and encouraged the clients to use at least three of their five senses. Use of eye contact and names to personalise the delivery was successful and the flow of and logical sequencing of material was generally good, particularly in relation to the introduction and body of the presentation. However, the guides were less successful in entertaining the audience, the thematic interpretation approach was generally not successfully applied, and the conclusions were poorly delivered.

2.8 CONCLUSION

The literature indicates that diverse definitions of interpretation have been given by various authors. What emerges from the literature is that, even if the definitions of interpretation seem to differ, it is evident that most of them see interpretation as communication with an intention to enhance tourists' experience and environmental and cultural conservation (through the minimisation of the tourists' environmental impact).

The literature also indicates that there are different perspectives on the history of interpretation. However, what comes out clearly is the fact that most authors are in agreement that Freeman Tilden is regarded as the person who gave the first professional definition of interpretation; thus they regard him as the father of interpretation.

Much as interpretation has become popular in other types of tour guiding, the same is true of ecotour guiding in the nature-based tourism in national parks. Interest in interpretation in nature-based tourism has grown, and this is due to the concerns raised regarding the environmental impact of tourists as well as to the tourists' own interest in

learning. In SANParks, interpretation which is provided specifically through guided activities is seen as a way of fulfilling SANParks' conservation and its tourism objectives. Therefore one of the key roles of ecotour guides in SANParks is interpretation. Ecotour guides need to be competent in communication in order to fulfil the interpretive role of conveying conservation messages while, at the same time, entertaining the tourist. Many authors such as Moscardo (1999) and Ham (1992) have made suggestions about what can enable ecotour guides to be effective in interpretive guiding. This study uses the EROT model of interpretive communication as its conceptual foundation. This model proposes that the characteristics of effective interpretation are enjoyment, relevance, organisation and a theme.

Evidence suggests that some ecotour guides may not be adequately performing all their roles as recommended and expected (Black, 2007:316). This inadequacy reinforces the need to consider the development and implementation of quality assurance and regulatory mechanisms that might address some of the problems (Black & Weiler, 2005:25). A further question for consideration in national parks is how to assess interpretation and maintain quality, which leads us to the role of evaluation in interpretation.

The following chapter (Chapter 3) deals with the question of what kind of measures national parks can use to in ensure quality in interpretive guiding, and the role of evaluation in assessing its quality.