

Evaluation Brief EB13

March 26, 2008

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Off-site Testing of Time Accelerator Markers

Overview: The *Trail of Time* team is in the process of developing markers for the portion of the Trail of Time known as the Time Accelerator where visitors walk along a 316 meter trail marked every meter at varying scales to encompass a total of 1 million years. The main purpose of this portion of the trail is to help folks understand and appreciate that a million years is a very long time.

The purpose of this test was to identify any red flags with the preliminary design and, based on the findings, make recommendations for the design of the prototype markers that will be tested in a few weeks on-site at Grand Canyon.

During the test sessions, one of two different versions of preliminary TAT markers were laid out in a hallway, approximately 6 inches apart, and tested with a wide range of individuals and groups including children, adults, individuals with college and some graduate degrees and some without, people who had been to the Grand Canyon and some who hadn't.



Version 1

- color change at each scale change
- Time Accelerator across top



Version 2

- no color change
- Trail of Time across top

Results & Discussion:

- Most respondents were able to quickly recognize that the scale was changing, and that the purpose of the trail was to help them understand how long a million years is, regardless which version was being used. This was an encouraging finding, and it will be interesting to see if it holds true on site when it is laid out to scale, and with all of the many distractions.
- Most respondents also successfully used the trail to develop a connection during the first 100 years, although this varied in personal connectedness, some referring to when their dad died, when their birthdays were, and others to what was happening in the world politically. A few respondents anticipated that the trail would help them figure out when the canyon was formed.

- Few of the respondents noticed the color shift in Version 1, and the absence of a color change did not seem to limit respondents' success. In fact, when respondents did notice the change in Version 1, it tended to confuse them as it was just one more thing to figure out.

- Most respondents (both versions) used the numbers to orient themselves. Few used the words, although one respondent appreciated reading WALK A MILLION YEARS right at the beginning as a way of knowing what she would be doing.
- WALK A MILLION YEARS and TIME ACCELERATOR TRAIL were difficult to read because of the length of the phrases, and the compressed feeling of the letters.
- In this test situation, most respondents did not appear to be confused about the two different trails, because it clearly switched sides of the hallway. This needs further testing on site to confirm this, as we are all in agreement that differentiating between the two trails is essential.
- While a few of the respondents appreciated the phrase ACCELERATOR, most took issue with it, although each cited a different reason. Some respondents tried to engage us in an argument about the fact that time was not actually accelerating, and some expressed concern that many visitors—including non-English speakers as well as children—would not understand what the word means. One respondent argued that TIME ACCELERATOR violates the peacefulness of the canyon and her sense of place. "Time Accelerator? is too pushy." No one was able to come up with a viable alternative, although people mentioned compression, dilation, and expansion. It will be important to continue testing this on site.

Recommendations:

- Develop two (or three?) sets of prototype TAT markers for testing at the rim. Because it won't be easy to iteratively develop and refine the markers while at the rim, having two or three pre-made sets, will maximize our ability to determine the best design.
- Make all markers (i.e. all prototype sets) the same color, i.e. no variation.
- Use a minimalist approach for testing the TAT markers on the rim. In other words, begin testing with the least amount of interpretation and add only what's necessary for the markers to be successful for the greatest number of visitors.

- Discuss and come to consensus at the next evaluation team meeting the exact wording to be included on each of the two sets of markers. The goals should be (a) have as little text as possible, and (b) have whatever text is on the markers easy to read at a glance. Two issues need to be considered: (a) the words to include, and (b) whether those words are along the top or the bottom of the circle. In deciding the final wording for the prototypes, we recommend variations of the following:

THE TRAIL OF TIME
TIME ACCELERATOR
Walk a million years
ACCELERATOR
<BLANK>