

>> **Pro Path Guide** >>
for History Majors & Graduate Students

Historic Site Guide (“Interpretation”) National Park Service

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Sources: Interview with Professor Michael Welsh, a detailed summary of an interview conducted by Professors Welsh and Melish with a UNC alum in the field, and research on professional websites.
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Overview of the Profession

The National Park Service (NPS) hires many historians to manage and interpret for the public the historic sites on their properties. The NPS has varied jobs in history fields including Park Ranger–Interpretation, education outreach, museum tech., archivist, and historic preservation positions. The primary purpose of the Park Ranger–Interpretation position is to provide tour guide services to visitors. The work involves giving talks, interpreting historic and natural features, answering questions, giving guided tours, and providing miscellaneous services to visitors. Guides present pre-established talks/demonstrations and lead tours, providing information based on the interpretive themes of the site. Programs are generally brief and given to varied audiences. They cover a specific topic relative to park themes and utilize previously prepared research and documentation. Park Rangers develop occasional programs/tours of a more specific nature that are of interest to the guide and are consistent with site interpretive themes. They also greet visitors, provide basic orientation to the site and local area, provide safety messages, and respond to questions. Guides also assist with the planning, preparation, and execution of NPS special events and programs such as the Junior Ranger and the Mentorship program. They also perform interpretive support duties including the use and care of audio-visual equipment, care for living history clothing, care and cleaning of interpretive props, inventory and stocking of brochures, maintaining supplies at interpretive stations, opening and closing the site, and recording visitation statistics.

Is any additional training, education or certification/qualification required, or helpful?

- Master’s degree in Public History
- Skills in working with the public
- Internship or work experience working in other public history programs
- Conversational skills in another language, especially Spanish or a language common locally, a plus
- Native American studies and/or archaeology studies helpful
- Some training in secondary education is needed if you want an “Educator” position catering to schools

Is an internship during undergrad necessary or recommended for employment in this field?

Yes, it is basically required. The more the better. One usually starts in a site run by the local government, then works up to a state level site, before getting to the federal level such as the NPS. Contact: Dr. Melish, jacob.melish@unco.edu

Description of the typical career path

Entry level positions are often volunteer, internship, seasonal or part-time positions, including with local or state historic sites. People with 2–3 years of relevant experience and an appropriate undergrad or graduate degree can seek out full-time positions. Competition is steep for the small number of jobs available as a Guide, which means they go to people who are well qualified: Be willing to relocate several times, look for positions in rural areas, and take the long but very interesting career path to full-time employment. Other positions with the NPS are easier to get and are a good way to get your foot in the door. A good entry level employer is the Student Conservation Association; they hire recently graduated undergrads and graduate students too. Summer internships typically start to be posted in December-January.

- Student Conservation Association jobs: <https://www.thesca.org/serve/positions>
- NPS jobs on USA Jobs website: <https://www.usajobs.gov/Search/Results?k=national%20park%20service>

What is the message to undergraduates?

Do well in your History BA and relevant internships, pick up conversational skills in a second language if possible (not required), and get a professional master’s degree in public history.

Average pay

Park Ranger (Interpretation): \$16.73–\$29.60/hr.

Source: <https://www.usajobs.gov/Search/Results?k=national%20park%20service&p=1> accessed 12/2020

UNC History Department or other UNC contact for students interested in employment in this field:

Professor Michael Welsh: Michael.Welsh@unco.edu.

Websites and/or books relevant to this career:

<https://www.nps.gov/>

Are internships available to UNC undergraduate and/or graduate students?

UNC has limited internships, usually unpaid to qualified students. They can be taken during the academic year for 1–3 credits or performed during the summer. Contact Professor Melish, jacob.melish@unco.edu

Are there paid positions for undergraduate or graduate students in this field?

Some paid part-time and summer jobs are available. Be willing to take any job offered.

Are there any UNC Alumni or employee working in the field who can answer further questions?

Yes. One can be contacted by Professor Melish, jacob.melish@unco.edu or Professor Welsh, michael.welsh@unco.edu. Also, if you end up in the field, please let us know! If you do an internship, your supervisor or colleagues will be good sources of information.