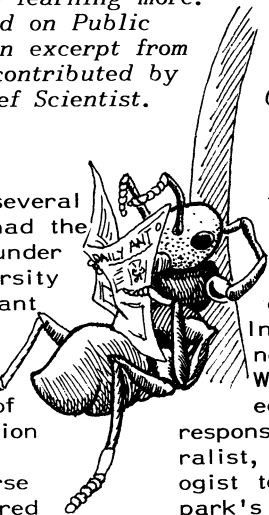


Editor's Note: At a recent public seminar to explore higher education—its directions, goals and content—the philosophical microbiologist, Lewis Thomas took sharp issue with those who spoke glibly of the need for "synthesis." He wound up his elaborate dissent with the observation that it would be far better if students did NOT get the impression at the end of their college years that everything could be neatly intertwined and "synthesized" into a package of all-purpose answers. He would far prefer, he said, that students leave their studies and go out into the world full of "informed bewilderment, a zest for ambiguity, and an intense curiosity always to be learning more." With this commentary currently being carried on Public Radio, it seemed worth the effort to dig up an excerpt from the May 1976 US NPS newsletter *In Touch*, contributed by Jim Reid, NPS Rocky Mountain Regional Chief Scientist. Other views will be welcomed in these pages.

A few years back—several decades, actually—I had the pleasure of studying under Bob King at the University of Iowa. Bob was an ant man; not exclusively, but for relaxation he liked to study the social structures of ant colonies. In addition to the normal castes—workers, soldiers, nurse ants, etc.—he discovered a new rank for which he coined the name pseudoergocytes. It has the body of a worker, looks like a worker, and acts like a worker. But it doesn't do anything.

Perhaps pseudoergocytes are just naturally lazy; or perhaps some ant colonies have an unemployment problem; or perhaps the pseudoergocytes are just waiting for strong leadership, and clear guidelines from the front office. I was thoroughly disturbed recently to hear that the latter is "...what interpretation needs." I protest. The strength and effectiveness of interpretation is dependent on the character and motivation of



the field interpreter, not on who or how many employees are assigned to the Washington Office or the regional offices. Interpretation does not need increased power in Washington; what is needed is the restoration of responsibility to the field naturalist, historian, and archeologist to plan and carry out the park's program.

There are two basic attributes that are common to all good interpreters—a catholic curiosity about the world in which s/he lives, and a willingness, indeed a driving need to share that curiosity with others. The shift of interpretive responsibility to the central office, and subsequent standardization of interpretive methods has contributed to the atrophy of curiosity. Inadvertently or by design, we have reduced the field interpreter to a pseudoergocyte. It's time the field interpreters once again be permitted the satisfaction of being full and creative workers. □