

Augmented Virtual Reality Transcript

Addison: Hello, welcome to the Prairie City Podcast. My name is Addison and I am joined today by Peter who is the state park interpreter for Prairie City and today we are going to be talking a little bit about virtual and augmented reality. Peter, how are you doing?

Peter: I'm doing great, how are you Addison?

Addison: I'm doing excellent. So, lately in your works as an interpreter at Prairie City you've been using various forms of virtual reality and augmented reality in your work. Why don't you go ahead and explain to us what those are.

Peter: So, virtual reality and augmented reality are a new type of technology that has come around and they've been slowly developing over years. Virtual reality is when you take a person and you put them into a virtual world. So, a lot of video game companies are capitalizing on that. Augmented reality is where you use the real world but you have the real-world person interact with a virtual item or object. We can use these in parks in a lot of different ways which is pretty fascinating.

Addison: It sounds very interesting. So, what are the different forms that you can use and how are they different with virtual reality vs augmented reality?

Peter: So, virtual reality can be used in a way like with people with disabilities or other things in their lives where they can't make it out to a park and we could take them into the park and have them interact with the park like that. For augmented reality, it's more of getting the user out to the park and letting them interact with virtual items. Prime example of that is Pokemon Go. We're getting people into an actual environment, into their parks but they're interacting and catching the Pokemon and things like that. Those are a couple different ways you could utilize it here.

Addison: Alright, cool. So, with that being said, how are they being used in educational aspects of your job?

Peter: Educational aspects of our job with the virtual reality its more about focusing on our mission of allowing everyone into our parks, all visitors are welcome. The other thing is that with virtually and with augmented reality we can actually have kids interact with creatures or animals in the park that they might not get to see or interact with. With augmented reality, many of the interpreters have been talking about we can get something that the kids could color and then it comes to life from the coloring page by using a tablet. Say for example we had a piece of paper in front of us, with a rattlesnake on it and a kid colored it. And then we took out our tablets, we opened up the app, we showed it to them and the snake came to life. WE could show them a couple thing that snakes do and we can talk about their temperament and things like that. So that adds to the educational aspect because nature doesn't really have an on que, no matter what we want to do.

Addison: Alright, that sounds pretty interesting. What are your plans for this augmented reality and virtual reality in the future within the park?

Peter: I think the plans could be really big. For our park, Prairie City in particular I'm looking at doing things that are more about mechanical uses, helping kids in schools learn about engines and things like that. But again, it's also the animal aspect of it as well. Letting kids see the creatures that are here, the critters, letting them check them out, see where their habitats are kind of at and letting them interact with their park in an augmented type of way. Virtual reality, it's going to be further down the line. We're going to have to wait until we get more funding in it with video game companies and stuff like that. But I do see that becoming a part of the parks where we can actually go in the classroom, have a bunch of kids put on eye sets and then virtually take them on a tour of a state park where you're leading a tour even though they couldn't make it there. It's actually pretty cost effective too, for the schools. But that is way further down the line.

Addison: What is your favorite thing you've discovered about these different realities while you've been working through them and figuring out how to use them?

Peter: I think my favorite thing about the realities; for the virtual reality, it's the VR lenses that we use to let people see what the park looks like. We've used them when we've gone to events and we've loaded them into the VR lenses. People literally look around the park that have never been here. Or we put it in there to show the improvements that we've done. Some folks haven't been out to Prairie City since the eighties, what does it look like now? So, then you can show them the improvements to your park that way and literally let them turn their heads and walk around and stuff. It's pretty neat. And for augmented reality I think that the really, really cool thing was again, can't stress this enough, the Pokemon Go stuff. I mean, national parks really jumped on it. Some of the state parks jumped on it. I could see something like that helping out with the parks getting more visitors to come visit and interact with their parks, become a part of it. Because we have to reach out to the new generations.

Addison: Yeah, we want to get them out into the par, experiencing nature one way or another.

Peter: Absolutely.

Addison: With this technology, how expensive is it? Is it something that someone can go out and purchase to start experiencing for themselves or is it a bit more of an investment?

Peter: Well for augmented reality a lot of the apps are free and if they're not free they're only a couple bucks that you can use and kind of play around with a check it out for yourself. One app in particular, NASA has an app to where you can use your phone or your tablet to get an augmented view of the Mars Lander and things like that and that was pretty cool. And this is all free. Virtual Reality though, that is going to be a little further down the line. Companies in San Francisco like Oculus Rift and other video game companies are going to start bringing these things in the flourish in but now it's pretty much still in its toddler years, if you want to think about it that way. Where they still need to finesse it and bring it out but I wouldn't be surprised if we see in the next five years that Xbox jumps onto this with Microsoft and the price of it becomes like a video game console, so like 500 bucks for a console that we could put people in and connect them with. So, I mean, with anything with technology it's going to take a little bit but we'll get there and we'll see where it kind of ends. It'll be fun.

Addison: Okay, so you're saying that it's still in its more toddler stage,

Peter: Yeah,

Addison: Where do you think it's going in the future, where do you think we're going to end up at?

Peter: I think we're going to end up at programs with Parks where we can literally go into the classroom with an Xbox, a couple goggles and turn on Bluetooth and let the kids explore the park on their own without them having to leave the classroom. I think that would be something that is neat, especially for low-income schools; buses become so expensive unless we can figure out a way to get bus prices down, I can totally see that being something. And I can totally see an interpreter using augmented reality markers in their parks to show certain animals, because animals don't always come out on cue—like we've talked about that. It would be cool if you came up to a marker on a tour and all of sudden it come up on your phone that there is an animal here and you see a bobcat sitting in the brush. You can click on it read on it and all the stats about the bobcat.

Addison: Okay, so like Pokemon Go but with actual animals,

Peter: Exactly, yeah. And a lot of the federal agencies have jumped on that too. They've taken actual animals and put them to the Pokemon stats but it's their actual stats and where they're at and things like that.

Addison: That's pretty cool.

Peter: Yeah, it's pretty neat.

Addison: So, if someone was really interested in buying some of these augmented reality devices where could they go to buy them or learn more information about them?

Peter: I would say, always a good thing is to check out your app store. You can type augmented reality into there and they'll have the apps that'll pop up. Most of this stuff you have to play with in order to figure it out, so I'd go that route. But the other route that I would go is doing a google search. Throw it into google there is a lot of great articles about Oculus Rift and what they're doing with virtual reality and you can also find a lot of companies who are now starting to become more invested into augmented reality. It's a brand new field but it's going to be something to watch for in the next five years.

Addison: Cool, so we've covered just the tip of the ice berg with this. Is there anything else that you would like us to know?

Peter: I think one thing that I would like folks to know is that with augmented and virtual reality in California State Parks we are not trying to supplement the actual park experience. There is something to be said about going to an actual park and interacting and wondering around and exploring that an app can't do. But if we can get people started into thinking more about their park and how to interact with them. Kind of touching base with them, most people are looking into their phones then maybe we can get more people into the parks and National Parks saw that with Pokemon Go. They were seeing an increase into their visitation. I mean, I think one

thing is we shouldn't shy away from technology, but we shouldn't forget our roots as park rangers.

Addison: Well, thank you for joining me again with Prairie City podcasts. Once again my name is Addison and I was joined by Peter. Have a good day.

Peter: Have a great day guys.