

Researchers field testing mobile app for visually impaired at Yosemite National Park

December 1 2017, by Brett Oppegaard



Martha Espitia, Nikki Richards, and Sarah Harris testing the UniD mobile app in Yosemite. Credit: University of Hawaii at Manoa

In continuing efforts to "audio describe the world," researchers at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa took part in a project that brought 26 blind and visually impaired people to Yosemite National Park for user testing of the UniD mobile app.

Associate Professor Brett Oppegaard in the School of Communications in the College of Social Sciences is the principal investigator of the UniDescription project.

The group, which included Oppegaard's research assistant Sajja Koirala, who is blind, tested the new audio description of Yosemite's brochure featured in the app. The research-instrument app is designed to make brochures at national parks accessible to those who have trouble seeing them.

The effort was coordinated with the California Council of the Blind's Fresno chapter, the national American Council of the Blind organization and Yosemite National Park.

The UniD app (available for both iOS and Android) contains audio description of more than 50 National Park Service brochures so far, including those for Everglades National Park, Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, the Statue of Liberty National Monument, Yellowstone National Park and the Washington Monument.

The research team, led by Oppegaard and Megan Conway and Thomas Conway from UH Mānoa's Center on Disability Studies, started the UniDescription project in the fall of 2014 as a way to improve and

encourage better audio description. Audio description is the translation of visual media, such as photographs and maps, into acoustic media in an effort to allow the ear to hear what the eye might not be able to see.



User testing of the UniD mobile app in Yosemite. Credit: University of Hawaii at Manoa

A long-range goal of this project is to audio-describe all of the more than 400 [park](#) sites throughout the United States.

This field research was sponsored by Google and the American Council

of the Blind as part of a larger grant project focused upon audio describing National Park Service sites throughout California.

Provided by University of Hawaii at Manoa

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