



It's as Easy as 1, 2, 3 what to do and how to do it



I'm a Piece of Moss wild, wet and wonderful comes to town



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Interpreters in the Mist Scottish Interpretation goes to Uganda

the journal for Scotland's Interpreters

Interpret Scotland

Issue 2 | autumn 2000



raising the standard

Interpret Scotland

www.interpretscotland.org.uk

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Interpret Scotland is an inter-agency initiative that seeks to:

- ◆ Improve the quality and quantity of interpretation in Scotland
- ◆ Promote the co-ordination of interpretation at local and strategic level
- ◆ Share resources, expertise and experience to avoid duplicating effort



Historic Scotland

Dressing up day at Stirling Castle!

standard *noun*. a level of quality or achievement

The Interpret Scotland steering group:

Emma Carver, Historic Scotland 0131 668 8600 emma.carver@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
David Downie, Scottish Natural Heritage 01738 444177 david.downie@snh.gov.uk
Ian Darwin Edwards, Royal Botanic Garden 0131 552 7171 i.edwards@rbgs.org.uk
Rosemary Everett, The Scottish Parliament, 0131 348 5393 Rosemary.Everett@scottish.parliament.uk
Julie Forrest, Scottish Natural Heritage 01738 444177 julie.forrest@snh.gov.uk
Jem Fraser, National Museum of Scotland 0131 225 7534 j.fraser@nms.ac.uk
Shannon Fraser, Council for Scottish Archaeology 0131 247 4119 csa@dial.pipex.com
Fran Hegyi, Scottish Museums Council 0131 229 7465 franh@scottishmuseums.org.uk
Bob Jones, Forest Enterprise 0131 334 0303 bob.jones@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
Colin MacConnachie, The National Trust for Scotland 0131 243 9359 cmacconnachie@nts.org.uk
Indira Mann, The National Trust for Scotland 0131 243 9359 imann@nts.org.uk
Rosalind Newlands, Scottish Tour Guides Association 01786 447784 info@scotstga.freemove.co.uk
Chris Tabraham, Historic Scotland 0131 668 8600 chris.tabraham@scotland.gov.uk
Other organisations with a national remit relevant to interpretation are welcome to join

Editor: David Masters, 0131 317 3360 email: dmasters@qmuc.ac.uk
Production co-ordinator: Lorna Brown, Awareness and Involvement Unit, Scottish Natural Heritage
Design and layout: Alan Chalmers, Design and Interpretative Services, Forest Enterprise
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Next edition

The next edition of the journal will take a look at audiences. Please contact the editor with any letters, news items and articles. Copy deadline is 15 December 2000.

Raising the Standard

What is a standard? Is it in the eye of the beholder? How far can we go in stipulating how to interpret landscapes, events or objects - should we even attempt to do so?

There are a number of ways we might broach these issues. Practically speaking the Highland Interpretative Strategy Project (page 3) has successfully evaluated existing interpretation with stark results. Will you be shocked to learn, for example, that only 40% of the mechanical or electrical devices used in the public displays tested actually worked? Or that less than 20% of the interpretation encouraged further exploration. Surely that is not only one of the basic aims of interpretation, but one of the key opportunities? Clearly standards do matter and there is a case for setting some ground rules.

However, when it comes to actually choosing the way to do it, interpreters are torn between two schools of thought.

On the one hand we have the sensible choice, one that offers us guidelines and promotes accessibility to all, whether that be via the height of a panel or the tone in our text. On the other we have an altogether more attractive offer - the temptation of innovation by creatively bending those guidelines. John Finlay (page 6) and James Carter (page 7) both explore ways of building on our ground rules to move from the competent to the inspired.

The success, or not, of this balancing act will be recognised by others, primarily, of course, the audience itself, but also by fellow practitioners.

With the current debate heating up as to the pros and cons of an Interpret Scotland award, John Iddon (page 5) offers us an insight into the search for objective judging. What might an Interpret Scotland Award do for interpretation in Scotland? Would it promote and publicise our efforts? Would it limit the competition and leave us out on a limb? But most importantly, would it help raise the standard? We would welcome your views.

Emma Carver, Interpretation Officer, Historic Scotland

Interpret Scotland is published twice a year and is distributed free on request. If you would like to join the mailing list, or if you are receiving duplicate copies, please contact Eilidh Strang at Scottish Natural Heritage on 01738 444177 email: eilidh.strang@snh.gov.uk

So, is it any good?

The Highland Interpretive Strategy Project has recently finished surveying all the interpretation in the Highlands. This is the biggest survey of its kind so far in Scotland, and demonstrates the scale of the challenge we face in improving standards.

The survey had two basic aims – to produce an inventory of what already exists, and to broadly assess whether it is any good. Overall, we surveyed 1,274 sites and 354 buildings, containing over 5,000 pieces of interpretation including panels, leaflets, guided tours, displays, exhibitions and so on.

Not surprisingly, leaflets and panels were the most numerous interpretive media. In terms of sheer volume, the top 5 interpretive topics were 'local history', 'wildlife', 'landscape', 'landuse', and 'archaeology'. However in terms of geographic spread, 'culture and the arts' had the most complete coverage.

"leaflets and panels were the most numerous interpretative media"

The quality assessment has given us a real indicator about how good the interpretation actually is. Some of its findings are as follows:

- ◆ Of the 234 mechanical and electrical devices surveyed, **only 93 (40%)** were working.
- ◆ 31% of sites had some wheelchair access, but **less than 3%** of the interpretation had any facilities for people with disabilities such as large print, Braille or an induction loop.
- ◆ **Only a third** of the written interpretation used language likely to relate to its audience. In the survey we defined this as language which either (i) addressed the audience as 'you'; (ii) made links or comparisons between the subject and peoples' everyday lives or common experience; or (iii) was humorous. Only 15% of the interpretation used such language to any significant extent, with **two thirds of all written interpretation** using text more appropriate to tourist information (see page 7 for more on writing good interpretive text).
- ◆ **Less than 20%** of the interpretation encouraged any further exploration of the site or topic.
- ◆ Most graphics and pictures were 'clearly related to the text'. However, **only half** the interpretive graphics were rated as 'visually stimulating'.
- ◆ In most instances, the interpretive text was rated as 'clear and legible', and made use of headings and sub-headings.
- ◆ **Only half** of the interpretation was rated as 'communicating a clear message or idea', but the rest was usually a confused jumble.

- ◆ **Only 39%** of the audio-visual displays held the attention of the audience 'most' or 'all the time'. Overall audio-visual displays came out quite well in the survey.

- ◆ 17.5% of the interpretation had some Gaelic translation, and 10% had some French and German.

So, it seems there is much room for improvement, and that basic principles and practice are too often being ignored. If the 'interpretation' does not provoke, relate and reveal, and it is not readily accessible, then it will simply fail to communicate the important feelings, ideas and messages we wish to convey to our visitors.

"future funding must be specifically targeted at producing better quality interpretation"

The purpose of this inventory was to produce a baseline from which we can help develop a co-ordinated, networked, quality experience for people visiting the Highlands. There is clearly a great deal of work to be done to achieve this, but the survey gives us a solid platform from which informed decisions can be made by those agencies and organisations involved in funding interpretation. Critically, we need systems that will support the maintenance and upgrading of existing provision, not just new projects; and future funding must be specifically targeted at producing better quality interpretation that is genuinely 'needed' and not just 'wanted'.

Rona Gibb, Highland Interpretive Strategy Project, Tel 01463 244437, rona.gibb@highland.gov.uk

The Highland Interpretive Strategy Project has published a practical guide on the survey methodology titled *What Have We Got and Is It Any Good? – A practical guide on how to survey and assess heritage interpretation*, available from Rona at £15.00.

Highland Folk Museum, Newtonmore, a very good example of live interpretation that came out well in the survey.



Highland Folk Museum

it's as easy as ✓ 1 ✓ 2 ✓ 3...

a checklist to help you produce better quality interpretation

There's a lot of interpretation around these days – some good, some not so good, and some pretty bad. Now we know the scale of the challenge (see page 3 for the vital evidence), what simple guidelines might help us to raise standards? We present below a checklist of points to consider in producing good quality interpretation – as ever do let us know what you think. Anyway, never mind the preamble, here's the checklist...

1 An interpretation plan is essential. Without knowing why, what, who for, when, and how you should interpret, you'll be in a right muddle.

2 Know your visitors and provide what is right for them. Don't just interpret what you're interested in.

3 Make sure you relate to your audience, and that they can connect with what you are trying to say.

4 Try to communicate a single, clear message or idea. This is the main 'theme' of your interpretation, and can hook your visitors into a more detailed story.

5 Don't interpret everything. Some things are best left for people to discover or wonder at for themselves.



6 Get specialist help if you're not sure what you're doing. Interpretation looks easy, but is difficult to do well.

7 Don't assume that your visitors know much about what you are interpreting, but don't underestimate their intelligence either.

8 Dull and boring is bad. Fun and provocative is good.

9 Be prepared to take risks – your visitors are not cautious bureaucrats, but normal people who will enjoy being excited, amused, challenged and entertained.

10 Stimulate all the senses. What can your visitors see, hear, feel, smell and taste?



11 Be interactive. Get your visitors doing things and playing games.

12 Don't preach. You may want to change people's attitudes or behaviour, but it pays to be subtle and to let people think and choose for themselves.



13 Layer your interpretation so that everyone gets the message, regardless of how bothered they can be to read / watch / listen to / do the whole thing.

14 People like stories and puzzles, even simple ones such as 'how the anemone got its legs'.

15 Mix your media: don't rely on ever more panels and leaflets.

16 A 'book on the wall' is a definite no-no. Keep any text short and sharp.



17 Think about how accessible your interpretation is. Can people get to it, and then can they understand it?

18 Good design is part of your message, but bad design will obscure it. Don't be seduced into doing something that looks good but doesn't make sense.

19 Don't spend too much on a nice-looking building only to run out of money when it comes to the interpretation. Your real 'product' is the interpretation, not the building.

20 Do encourage your visitors to explore further.

21 Do measure how well the interpretation is working.

22 And finally, once you've learned all the rules, be prepared to 'bend' them. The most successful interpretation is often deliberately different.

"Praise invariably implies a reference to a higher standard"
Aristotle (384-322 BC). Greek writer and philosopher.

a matter of judgement

One way in which standards of interpretation are assessed is through awards and grading schemes. Here we report on two such initiatives – the Interpret Britain award and the Scottish Tourist Board grading of visitor attractions – as an indication of what the judges are looking for.

interpreting Britain

The Interpret Britain awards have been run by the Association for Heritage Interpretation (formerly SIBH) since the 1980s. Their aim is to 'recognise and publicise outstanding practice in the provision of interpretive services to the public'.

Traditionally entries have come from sites that you could visit. Hence, judges were originally given a huge form that asked questions about the site and its services, scored from 1 to 10. Successful entries were decided by their total score.

This, however, was very cumbersome. Judges rebelled at the results the forms came up with, some going as far to say "you just know in your gut what's good and bad, so let's just judge the entries on 'intuitive response'". So we held a seminar in 1996 to test the 'intuitive response'. Groups of judges visited various York museums and sites and rated them according to their gut feeling. The results did not, predictably, come up with much consensus. So a working party drew up new criteria, less complicated than the original system, but more objective (it was hoped) than the intuitive one. Ten criteria were agreed including:

- ◆ First impressions: are you drawn in and welcomed? Is the orientation clear?
- ◆ Communication of message/s: how successfully are they communicated?
- ◆ Use of media: is it appropriate?
- ◆ Enlightenment: does one go away stimulated and wanting to know more?
- ◆ Stimulus: how far is one 'provoked' into thinking and working things out?

These new criteria were then tested in York, and there was a much greater level of agreement than with the purely intuitive system.

However, there is still a challenge in judging the increasing number of entries which are not 'sites', but are community events, live interpretation programmes, publications, audio-guides, videos and web sites, etc. In these cases judges get together to adapt the criteria to suit the new interpretive methods.

So it seems there is no perfect solution to the search for objective judging. However, each year we have a 'Special Judges Award' where several of the judges agree on the very best awards for that year. There have been two cases of total unanimity: the Conservation Centre in Liverpool and the Boyne Valley Visitor Centre in Ireland. Perhaps that just proves what we all know – that there's no dispute when it comes to things of the highest quality.

John Iddon, Interpret Britain Awards Organiser, Tel 020 8240 4018

Should there be an Interpret Scotland award along the lines of the Interpret Britain award? If so, how should the two awards be linked? We would greatly value your views – please email Bob Jones at Forest Enterprise on bob.jones@forestry.gsi.gov.uk



National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside

Not just a lump of stone: showing kids what happens behind the scenes at the award winning Conservation Centre in Liverpool

five star interpretation

Over 800 visitor attractions in Scotland are graded by the Scottish Tourist Board for the quality of their visitor welcome and customer care.

Criteria assessed include the efficiency and friendliness of staff, the attraction's orientation and layout, and the standards of interpretation and presentation of information. These, and other factors such as catering, toilets and retail, are rated on a scale of 1 to 5 Stars.

The interpretation and presentation is assessed according to the following criteria:

- ◆ Clarity of displays
- ◆ Significance of displays
- ◆ Relevance and appropriateness of the interpretation within the overall theme or topic
- ◆ Comprehensiveness of interpretation experienced during visit
- ◆ Information on purpose of attraction, society etc
- ◆ Opportunities or suggestions for follow-up information, where appropriate
- ◆ Suitability of chosen medium e.g. audio visual
- ◆ Maintenance of medium provided
- ◆ Technical standards of presentation
- ◆ Effectiveness of design
- ◆ Quality of experience

The industry find the 1 to 5 scale a useful tool for benchmarking and targeting improvements, and the visitor finds it a helpful indicator of the standard of provision they can expect.

For more information about the attractions Quality Assurance Scheme, contact the Scottish Tourist Board, Tel 01463 723040.

rules of engagement

Life without rules would be impossible. Think about the implications of having no social controls. Chaos. So rules are good and necessary. Agreed.

Now think about what the creative world would be like without rule breakers: mind-numbingly boring. There would have been no Michaelangelo, no Impressionists, no Henry Moore, no Miro, no Clockwork Orange, no...

Look at contemporary advertising. It is highly creative, evolutionary and constantly making and breaking new boundaries. Some is very provocative or amazingly subtle. The best invents new rules.

Because so much advertising is produced, it has to be creative. Otherwise, the public would simply stop looking or listening. The same is true in the interpretive industry, but the dynamic envelope is mostly missing.

Consequently, the public is becoming immune to the panels inhabiting Scotland's lay-bys, woodland walks, historic sites and just about everywhere else. Much of Scotland's external interpretation is in danger of becoming environmental detritus.

Is it because the bulk of our interpretation is sponsored by public agencies or local groups? And by using safe solutions, some of which are 20 to 30 years old, do many organisations purposely avoid the same risk? Do many view interpretation as just about bunging a few words and some graphics together? I don't know.

But I believe there is a solution:

- ◆ Accept good-practice-rules are important and use them to test, not predetermine.
- ◆ Creativity and risk taking must be perceived as normal. They will kick-start a new interpretive generation.
- ◆ Real design must become an integral part of the process. I mean Total-Design, which welds words, graphics, 3-dimensional creativity, calligraphy and art-installations with human emotions, senses and contemporary intellectual needs such as learning, humour, discovery, shock, curiosity and entertainment.
- ◆ Too much external interpretation has faded, leaked or cracked because it was installed to a low budget. Poor first impressions mean the public walks away. If quality cannot be afforded, do not do it.
- ◆ Equally importantly, external interpretation needs to become more than just panels. It must adopt a holistic approach which addresses the interpretive outputs and site context. Installations are required that contribute to or stimulate the environment, not detract from it. If in doubt, do nothing.
- ◆ Think about interpretation in the context of 21st century public perceptions, needs, aspirations, attention spans, attitudes, communication techniques, and globalisation. All of which are changing at an incredible rate.

Well, I've just invented some more rules... Where will they take us? I hope, into a new, creative and productive era of interpretation.

John Finlay, Interpretive Designer, Tel 0131 558 7214



one of our standards is missing...

In 1998, when working for North Lanarkshire Museums and Heritage Section, I carried out a piece of research to identify standards in the museum sector. I tracked down over 60 sets of standards produced by government agencies and professional bodies for museums. These related to a wide range of activities from conserving objects to organising volunteers, but none were specific to interpretation.

The most detailed coverage of interpretation is provided by *Standards for Touring Exhibitions*¹, published by the Museums & Galleries Commission. This document has 36 sections including one on interpretation, with others relating to issues such as exhibition concepts, market research and evaluation. However, this document only deals with touring exhibitions and not with other key provision such as permanent exhibitions and guiding.

Interpretation makes a shadowy appearance in several of the other standards. The UK Museum Registration Scheme is the national accreditation scheme for museums, and sets down minimum standards for public museums. It has a section on public services, but this is rather loosely-worded and makes only a broad requirement for levels of service that are 'appropriate' to the museum.

Overall, however, the lack of standards for museum interpretation suggests that interpretation is not seen as an important area of professional development within the sector. Earlier this year, the Museum Association, the largest UK membership body for museum professionals, re-wrote its widely respected definition of museum. The word 'interpretation' was dropped from the new definition. However, education (in all its forms) is an area of museum work that has developed enormously in recent years. If a set of standards relevant to museum interpretation is to emerge, this is perhaps where it is mostly likely to come from.

Dan Hillier, Visitor Centre Manager, Royal Observatory Edinburgh, Tel 0131 668 8406
d.hillier@roe.ac.uk

¹ *Standards for Touring Exhibitions* (1995) is available from the Museums and Galleries Commission at £10.00. Contact n.poole@mgcuk.co.uk

"The very essence of the creative is its novelty, and hence we have no standard by which to judge it"
Carl Rogers (1902-1987). Psychologist and educator.

plant the standard in my navel

The trouble with writing about standards in writing is that you're staring at your own navel. So forgive me if you don't find that fascinating, but let's begin with a few thoughts about what we mean by a 'standard'. Something to aim for; a banner to rally round; a marker for others to follow. But also something run-of-the-mill; standardised; reliable but dreary. Like a meal in a café run by a 'bland roadside restaurant chain' - you know what you'll get, but do you really want it?

"our job is to feed our readers' heads"

Some interpretation relies too much on the 'roadside restaurant', without taking a chance on that bistro in a strange part of town. The shame is that a lot of time, love and money is often lavished on illustration and design, only for the text to be safe and dull at best, and turgid at worst. I think the problem lies with the power of words. Because they appear to define more exactly what we want to say, people are very protective about them. Academic specialists still insist on writing exhibition copy that's more suitable for a book; committees will argue over turns of phrase until what's left is anodyne pap; everyone seems afraid of letting some real life into the story. I recently had to censor a re-telling of a folk tale in which I had the hero and heroine 'making love' on the hillside. Now the lady just 'entrances' her man, and the story loses its essence. And I originally named the 'roadside restaurant chain' in this article, since it made more lively reading, but legal advice has warned against it!

Perhaps part of the problem lies in the orthodoxy of interpretive planning. Defined themes and objectives have done a lot to bring focus and conciseness, but if too prescriptive they can be a straitjacket. First, nothing written has a reliable, independent meaning. Visitors make their own meaning from the experiences they have on site, the thoughts, memories and feelings they bring with them, the things they do with their companions. The words and images we offer them are just part of that.

Second, defining the purpose of interpretation too tightly leaves no room for the imagination.

GLENTRISS
5
TRAILQUEST

When the breath goes from the body, when our limbs feel chill, where do we go?



You can see one of our beakers in Peebles museum.

At the last thin moon we laid my grandfather in the ground. We gave him nuts for the journey, charred so they'll keep longer.

I like to think of him out here, not in the earth, flying with the birds he hunted. I hang feathers in the trees for his flight.

Creative writing brings a forest cycle trail to life.

For me this has always been the real reason for doing interpretation at all - our job is to 'feed our readers' heads, to borrow a phrase from Grace Slick. And the thought of a statistician trying to prove that a project is value for money because 63.7% of visitors know why water is wet fills my soul with fog.

"committees will argue over turns of phrase until what's left is anodyne pap"

I want to show some examples of writing that I think carries a standard. Susan Cross wrote this poem as the introductory text for an exhibition about the River Wey in Guildford. It gives a lot of information, but it also sings as the river flows, and is reminiscent of childhood learning about how one thing leads to another:

This is the river that cut chalk and sand, that watered the meadows and improved the land.

This is the river that gave the mills power to make paper and iron and timber and flour.

This is the river, channelled and locked, to carry the barges to London Docks.

This is the river that broke its bounds to flood the streets of Guildford town.

This is the river, protected for ever, where past and present mingle together.

At Loch Sunart, Michael Glen has been working with Bob Jones of Forest Enterprise to weave Gaelic words directly into English text. This is a challenge to read because it interrupts the flow, but it adds an awareness of another way of understanding the world without the tyranny of bilingual text.

If you follow the path [frith-radad](#) towards the loch, you will see Dun Ghallain, an Iron Age chieftan's fort built on an island [eillean](#) more than 2,000 years ago. It was a place of refuge and almost certainly a signalling point [rubha](#). The sheltered bays [camais](#) have been used here for thousands of years, and at Risga, there was a large Middle Stone Age settlement [baile](#).

At Glentress Forest in the Borders, I worked on ways to make the past speak to our imagination rather than our intellect. Panels on a cycle route visiting prehistoric sites are written as extracts from the diary of a Bronze Age hunter, illustrated with a burial urn. You can read an extract on the illustration above.

So what shall we do about our interpretive writing? Let's aim for high standards, but let's not be content with standard writing.

James Carter, Interpretation Consultant and Trainer, Tel 0131 317 3360
jascarter@compuserve.com

"Acceptance of prevailing standards often means we have no standards of our own."
Jean Toomer (1894-1967). US author, poet.

research review

Here again we delve into the world of interpretation research, and report on an innovative education/interpretation case study.

Does technology work?

Last summer Alexander Macdonald carried out a study as part of a research studentship with the University of the Highlands and Islands into the success (or otherwise) of the new visitor exhibition *Loch Ness 2000* at Drumnadrochit. 280 visitors were interviewed about the effectiveness of modern technology, which is a significant feature of the exhibition. The results clearly showed that visitors found it both appealing and imaginative, and few problems were encountered. Overall, 87% agreed that the technological approach had appealed to them.

For more information contact Alex on alex@sconser.free-online.co.uk.

How to assess standards of interpretive guiding

In an 18 month study in Australia, Betty Weiler and Alice Crabtree evaluated 23 nationally accredited ecotour companies in order to compare different methods of assessing standards of interpretive guiding.

The study focused on competencies unique to ecotour guiding, such as interpretive skills, minimum impact techniques, sensitivity to local environment and culture, and the guides' knowledge of sustainability and conservation issues. The study's conclusions were as follows:

- ◆ According to a closed-ended questionnaire, client satisfaction was high. However, open-ended questions were more useful at revealing shortcomings, especially in relation to the learning experience being sought by the clients
- ◆ Independent, professional assessors were more critical than the clients. The professional assessors scored guides less well on key aspects of communication and interpretation skills
- ◆ The clients were generally not critical, and surveys of their satisfaction were not a dependable indicator of guiding standards
- ◆ The guides' main weaknesses were 'organisation of information', 'use of interpretive themes', 'presentation techniques', and 'involvement of the audience'
- ◆ Most guides thought they were weakest in content and subject knowledge, whereas the clients considered their knowledge and passion as their main strengths.

For further information contact Bill Taylor at bill.taylor@snh.gov.uk

Wild, wet and truly wonderful

Children from Allan's Primary School had a unique opportunity to learn more about their local environment of Flanders Moss when Wild, Wet and Wonderful came to Stirling. The Smith Art Gallery and Museum was the venue for Scottish Natural Heritage's touring exhibition on peatbogs.

Through a series of workshops and performances, the children participated in cross-curricular activities, combining Expressive Arts and Environmental Studies. Their interpretation of the exhibition developed through subsequent art, music and drama projects. The workshops were led by two specialist teachers and an actor with experience in community drama.

The project demonstrated how expressive arts help us understand the world in which we live, and develop a closer appreciation of an important local environment. "The children thoroughly enjoyed their workshops", said Mairi Breen, Headteacher at Allan's Primary School. "We have a super display of high quality work in school, and Flanders Moss has 100 new young enthusiasts! The Expressive Arts performances were first class and many parents told me how they, too, had learnt more about Flanders Moss from their children's drama. Dozens of fascinating facts were revealed, such as why deer eat frogs, and how moss makes excellent nappies. The workshop experiences make an outstanding contribution to Allan's programme for lifelong learning. We use the resources at the Smith regularly, and it was super to see Wild, Wet and Wonderful here in Stirling". For more information, contact Sarah Fairclough on 01334 462400, who co-ordinated the workshops as part of her St Andrews University Museum Studies degree.

SNH intend to place the findings of the Wild Wet & Wonderful evaluation on their website in the near future. In the meantime, the exhibition will be touring in Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders until spring 2001.

For details see the SNH website www.snh.org.uk.

Children from Allan's Primary School, Stirling perform a piece inspired by the Wild, Wet and Wonderful display



"When a civilisation becomes so standardised that the individual can no longer make an imprint on it, then that civilisation is dying"

Elis Faure (1931-). French sculptor.

letters

A plea for plain English

Dear Editor

An interesting first issue and I look forward to reading the next one! May I express the hope that this journal will become a forum for the exchange of experiences and ideas in plain English, and that it will not become hijacked by those who love nothing more than to fill pages with the standard collection of sterile corporate phrases which seem to pour from many organisations these days.

Yours faithfully,

Lindsay Mackinlay
Scottish Natural Heritage
22 Bannantyne Street
Lanark
ML11 7JR

Avoid the bland and uniform

Dear Editor

Thank you for the recent edition of Interpret Scotland.

It is an interesting concept and if it helps the various agencies to work together, perhaps enabling them to cut some of their over-heads and expenses as well as sharing ideas, that can only be good.

However I, personally, have one major concern. And that is that Scotland, in its effort to raise standards, is becoming bland and rather uniform. Cafes, tearooms, loos, B&Bs, signage, etc. Stripped pine, bleached ash, pale oak! Themed everything. Very nice and tidy and oh so

dull. Individuality should surely be recognised, it should be understood that to be different is not necessarily wrong.

Though we are all products of our time, it is perhaps a good idea to remember that one man's meat is another man's poison! Nothing will be a substitute for people. Staff should be encouraged to use their imagination, common sense and intelligence rather than just working to a formula.

And so I wish Interpret Scotland the best of luck, and I hope it comes up with lots of wild and unusual ideas.

Yours faithfully,

Mary Maclean
Arngask
Glenfarg
Perthshire PH2 9QA

What about the arts?

Dear Editor

Congratulations on the first issue of 'Interpret Scotland', a stimulating journal which is not afraid to court controversy! I found it disappointing, however, that there was so little reference in this first issue to the arts. This may have something to do with the absence of the Scottish Arts Council from the list of participating organisations!

It's not just that the arts have a great deal to offer those involved in all forms of interpretation: that was very evident in John Shedden's excellent performance at the journal's Edinburgh launch. It's also the case that the arts need to adopt, and benefit from, the principles of good interpretation. For example, exhibitions of contemporary visual arts can veer from being smothered in text to a total avoidance of labels. Contemporary music and dance need to reach beyond their core niche audiences. Classical music has to bridge a widening age divide without debasing its core qualities. Too often such issues become polarised between charges of 'elitism' and 'dumbing down': A deeper understanding of what constitutes sympathetic and imaginative interpretation could overcome such damaging oppositions.

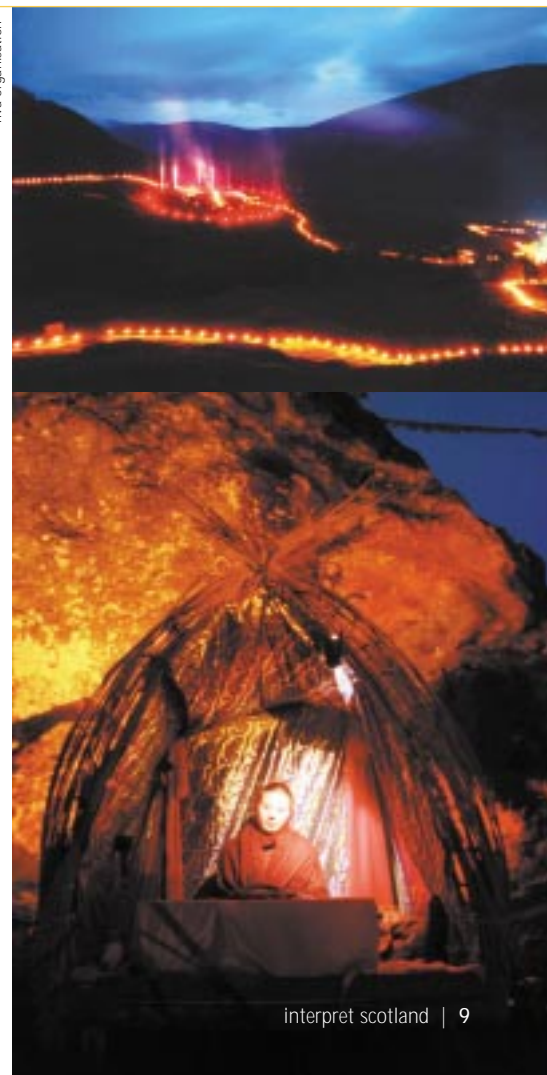
As we await the launch of a National Cultural Strategy, it is clearly going to be crucial that the arts are seen to stand alongside other areas of cultural expression, notably heritage and environment. There are some interesting straws in the wind. Nva's 'The Path', in Glenlyon in June, was, for all who experienced it, an extraordinary demonstration of how the arts can illuminate both history and environment and create a unique fusion of the three. And later that month, the EU-funded Duthcas project brought together, at a seminar in North Uist, representatives of the arts, heritage and environment sectors to debate issues of interpretation that were clearly common to all three. Perhaps both these topics might furnish material for future issues of the journal!

Yours faithfully,

Robert Livingston
HIArts
Bridge House, Bridge Street
Inverness IV1 1QR

Nva's 'The Path', in Glenlyon in June, was an extraordinary demonstration of how the arts can illuminate both history and environment and create a unique fusion of the three.

nva organisation



On this page we report on interpretation news south of the Border and even further afield.

what's up elsewhere



European standards and networking

TransInterpret is a European project that aims to develop and promote standards for interpretive trails and guiding. The project brings together partners from Austria, Germany, and Scotland. Their goal is to develop interpretation quality standards using existing literature and experience, and to test these on the ground in the three countries. The resulting standards will be published as a 'permanently evolving' database incorporating good practice checklists, relevant criteria, procedural recommendations, and case studies. Practical issues that will be addressed include interpretive planning, themeing, writing and design.

TransInterpret recently held a workshop in Germany to examine ways in which to evaluate and document good practice. The workshop also discussed the proposed European Interpretation Network reported in the last edition of *Interpret Scotland*.

For more details, contact Patrick Lehnés at Freiburg University, Tel (00 49) 761 203 3595, pale@ipg.uni-freiburg.de

Over the pond

Standards for interpretive master planning have taken a jump forward in the USA, writes John Veverka - interpretive planner and author of *Interpretive Master Planning*. These developments are based on incorporating new ideas from tourism marketing into interpretive planning. They include:

- ◆ 'Experience based planning', which aims to give visitors memories, not just 'facts' about heritage sites that they might otherwise forget.
- ◆ 'Product and outcome based planning', designed to ensure that if you produce a \$2,000 interpretive panel you will get \$2,000 or more in benefits from your investment.
- ◆ 'Markets of one' and 'mass customisation', which aim to develop more targeted interpretive programmes and services for a wider range of market groups.

Interpretive planning in the States is increasingly focusing on how to attract visitors, have them truly understand and remember our story and message, and at the same time get a return on our investment. Interpretive planning must also address how the resource, the visitor, and the agencies /organisations will benefit from the interpretation.

For more details contact John at jvainterp@aol.com

Interpreters in the mist

In March this year, a team of three Scottish interpreters travelled to Uganda to undertake a contract for the International Gorilla Conservation Programme.

David Campbell of Campbell and Co interpretive designers, and interpretive planners David Masters and Karen McDonald, were commissioned to prepare an interpretation plan for a new visitor centre for the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. Bwindi Forest, on the Congo border, is a World Heritage Site and home to 300 mountain gorillas (nearly half the world's population).

The purpose of the visit was to facilitate a 3-day interpretive planning workshop with the Park's key stakeholders. Workshop participants included Park staff, Uganda Wildlife Authority planning and tourism officers, a Uganda Tourism Board advisor, local tourist operators, and community representatives. Participatory workshops of this kind are commonplace for development projects in Africa.

Karen McDonald



We found great enthusiasm for interpretation, and it was the Park rangers and community representatives who came up with some of the best ideas. One of the most interesting sessions involved participants presenting objects that told a story about the Park. These objects ranged from gorilla dung and a glass of water to locally crafted baskets and honeycomb. Each object provided an excellent touchstone to tell visitors about the Park, its wildlife, and the many bonds between local people and the forest.

We also had an unforgettable encounter with the gorillas – 4 hours tracking our way through seriously impenetrable forest to spend one hour with a family group of 16 gorillas headed by one very laid back silverback.

The resulting interpretive plan has been enthusiastically welcomed by the clients. The Ugandan authorities are very keen to further develop sustainable tourism at Bwindi, as tracking fees are the main income for gorilla conservation in Uganda. 20% of the entrance fee also goes to the community, and has so far funded 21 local schools, 3 medical centres, and much road building. A local women's group sing, drum and dance for tourists, with the income being saved to buy a diesel mill to grind maize into flour. Many visitors also stay at the community-owned campground, with all profit going into further community projects.

If this has whetted your appetite for Uganda, an incredibly beautiful country which Winston Churchill called 'the Pearl of Africa', then check out www.visituganda.com.

Karen McDonald, Interpretation Consultant, Tel 01337 810776

Are you involved in interesting overseas work? If you would like to share this with the readers of *Interpret Scotland*, please get in touch.

Relaxing in the jungle: the silverback studiously ignores the feverish visitors

Interpret Scotland

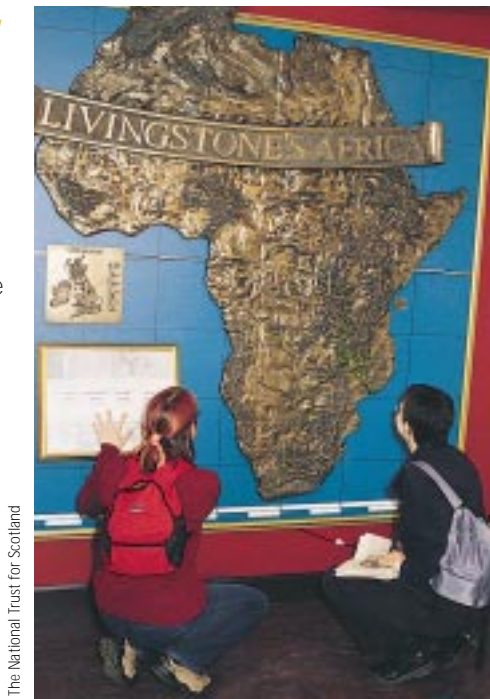
Interpret Scotland continues to develop as more organisations get involved. The Scottish Tour Guides Association, the Council for Scottish Archaeology and the Royal Botanic Gardens have now joined.

The Interpret Scotland website has also now been launched. You can visit it at www.interpretscotland.org.uk

news and events

A Life Less Ordinary

The National Trust for Scotland has just completed a major facelift of the David Livingstone Centre in Blantyre. The story of his incredible life is told at the Centre, where the interpretive displays contrast his boyhood in Scotland with his exploits in Africa. They also deal with controversial subjects such as the slave trade and the European colonisation of Africa. Allusions to the famous meeting between Livingstone and Stanley are 'refreshingly brief', with the emphasis instead on Livingstone the explorer, missionary, husband, father and vociferous humanitarian. Indra Mann, Interpretive Planner with the Trust is very pleased with the outcome "The success of the project depended on NTS staff working closely with the design company. Graphic designers, multi-media specialists and property staff burned the candle at both ends to wrap the project up in time for a May opening".



The National Trust for Scotland

Livingstone's African travels graphically brought to life.

Disability Discrimination Act

A belated thank you to Sarah Oswald of Touchstone (Tel 0131 337 9961) for contributing the report on the Disability Discrimination Act in the last edition.

Association for Heritage Interpretation website

The AHI website is being revamped, and is worth a visit to help your interpretive networking: www.heritageinterpretation.org.uk.

Events

Journeys Through Time – interpreting geology for the public

Scottish Natural Heritage
18/19 October 2000, Cairngorms. £70.00 excl. accommodation
Contact Eilidh Strang, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel: 01738 444177

Weaving the Future with Threads from the Past

US National Association for Interpretation annual workshop
7-11 November 2000, Tuscon, Arizona \$350-400 excl. accommodation.
Contact Heather Manier, NAI, Email: naimbrmgr@aol.com

Working with Words

Interpret Scotland
15 November 2000, Battleby, Perth. £60.00
Contact Eilidh Strang, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel: 01738 444177

Organising programmes of guided walks & events

Losehill Training, 27-28 November, Losehill Hall, Castleton, Derbyshire, £225.00
Contact Sue Davies, Losehill Hall, Tel: 01433 620373

Influencing Recreational Behaviour

Scottish Natural Heritage
21 February 2001, Battleby, Perth. £50.00
Contact Eilidh Strang, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel: 01738 444177

Environmental Arts Seminar

Scottish Natural Heritage
6 March 2001, Battleby, Perth. £50.00
Contact Eilidh Strang, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel: 01738 444177

Scottish Tour Guide Association Regional Studies Tours

October 2000 – May 2001 £55.00 / £100.00
Contact the University of Edinburgh Continuing Education, Tel 0131 650 4400

Publications

Guidelines for Producing an Information Panel

Northamptonshire Countryside Services (1999)
52 pp, £6.00 incl. p&p
This practical guide is aimed at local communities, and provides clear and useful advice on how to plan and implement outdoor panels. The details about manufacturing techniques and costings are a little dated, but otherwise it is a useful publication written for a non-specialist audience. Available from the Nene Valley Project, Environment Directorate, Northamptonshire County Council, PO Box 163, County Hall, Northampton NN1 1AX, Tel: 01604 236633.

Explaining Our World: An Approach to the Art of Environmental Interpretation

Andrew Pierssene (1998), Routledge
ISBN 0 419 21940 4, 264 pp, £45.00
This book offers a 'rational and philosophical approach to environmental interpretation'. It reviews current practice and contains over 40 illustrated case examples. "One of the three or four most valuable books on the subject to be produced in the past chaotic 50 years" Kenneth Hudson, European Museums Forum.

Please note: Interpret Scotland does not referee or subject any publications to a formal review process. We do not specifically recommend or endorse any publication, and purchasers should satisfy themselves as to their worth.

Scottish Interpretation Network internet site launched

The Scottish Interpreters Network (SIN) has launched a web site and email discussion forum for Scottish interpreters. The email discussion forum is accessed through the web site www.scotinterpnet.org.uk, and is designed to enable Scottish interpreters to communicate easily with each other. This could be about policy issues, your general thoughts and feelings about interpretation in Scotland, or about practical things like advice on printing options for producing an outdoor panel. The more who sign up to the discussion forum, the more useful it will become.

the back page report we continue with our case study reports -
this time focusing on two arts based interpretation projects

eyes on stalks

'Eyes on stalks not bums on seats.' So goes the mantra that is written into the heart of Welfare State International, the well-known and innovative theatre company. The chance to create work that inspires and reveals the unknown in an unexpected way is the real reward of commissioning an artist to work on an interpretation project.

Trust, imagination and nerve are the key ingredients. We strive to allow commissioners and artists to work together, often in association with the community in which the work is being created, to produce works of art that will stand the test of time. The two projects below, 'Legend' and 'Poems on the River Cree', give an insight into how artists can be used on interpretation projects:

Legend

'Legend' by Diane McLean is an uncompromising sculptural intervention set at four sites in the Highlands. It consists of a bright stainless steel line that closely follows the contours of its hillside location. A trigger, sensed by the approaching viewer, activates a recording of a newly commissioned lament of *Carmina Gadelica* by Alexander Carmichael, overlaid by the traditional poem in both Gaelic and English. The works make a vivid and intimate reference to the anguish caused by the Clearances through the juxtaposition of sculpture, sound and location.

"The works make a vivid and intimate reference to the anguish caused by the Clearances"

Legend toured the Highlands to remote and often inaccessible communities. Collaboration was key to its success, and included working with composers, a poet, metal workers, sound technicians and students at Gairloch High School - who created sound works in response to the issues raised by the sculpture. These works were then professionally recorded and promoted through audio CD. The work now lives on through both installations at exhibitions and the CD, which includes an in-depth discussion of the process of the project.

Legend has created a real chance for residents and visitors to question present day relationships with such a dramatic historical event, and to engage in a direct way with contemporary art. Our own eyes were opened to the real depth of enthusiasm that can be generated by an arts project that is rooted within its cultural context and that deals with real issues, and to the fact that such work can generate a whole host of other projects and collaborations that continue after the initial project has finished.

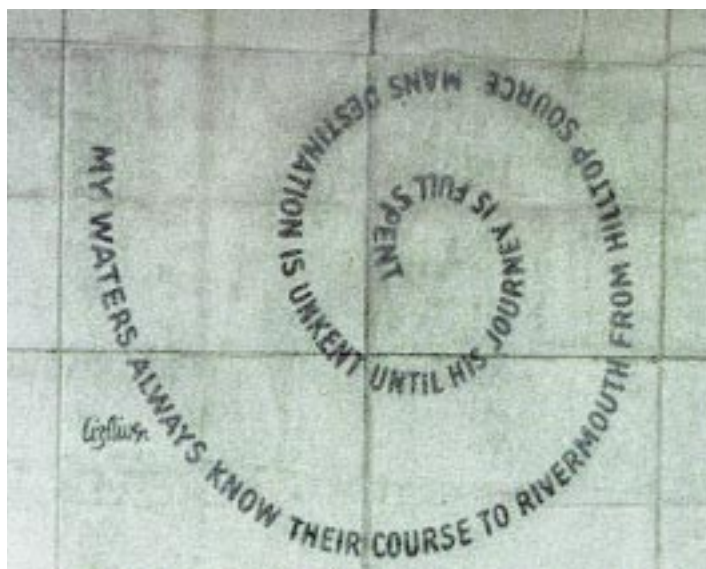
poems on the river cree

A writer working with the landscape in a direct way can be very effective in bridging the gap between visual art and the written word. Nic Coombey of Solway Heritage and poet Liz Niven were commissioned by the Newton Stewart Initiative to research and write a series of poems that would reveal and emphasise the value of the surroundings and reveal the hidden history and ecology of the River Cree.

The connection between the river and people was especially important. Liz spoke to local people who use the river, and researched the town's history and the river's ecology. This information was distilled and filtered through her work. The bombardment of words, their sounds and rhythms were as important as hearing peoples' ideas and opinions. The names of plants, animals and fishing flies frequently held a rhythm of their own or an echo of others.

"The names of plants, animals and fishing flies held a rhythm of their own"

The words were incorporated into landmarks and elements along the route. Liz and Solway Heritage worked with local crafts people to bring the words alive, and poems are now found embedded in many bridges, handrail and seats along the river.



Accessibility was key to gaining ownership and understanding amongst the community. Liz, who lives locally, gained the trust of both the commissioner and viewers through her research and project development process. Her own work and aspirations also grew as a result, and now a new publication has been released.

"An art project has the ability to surprise and reveal the unknown"

It is this two-way dialogue that allowed the interpretative role of both artists to develop beyond our expectations. I urge you to take a controlled risk, and to commission or become involved with an art project that has the ability to surprise and reveal the unknown. You never know, the results may well be the most remembered part of your interpretation project.

Tom Littlewood, Independent Public Arts, Tel 0131 555 0045