



Telling Stories and
Launching Journals
Interpret Scotland
introduced and explained



The Vital Link
interpreting
Scotland's
heritage



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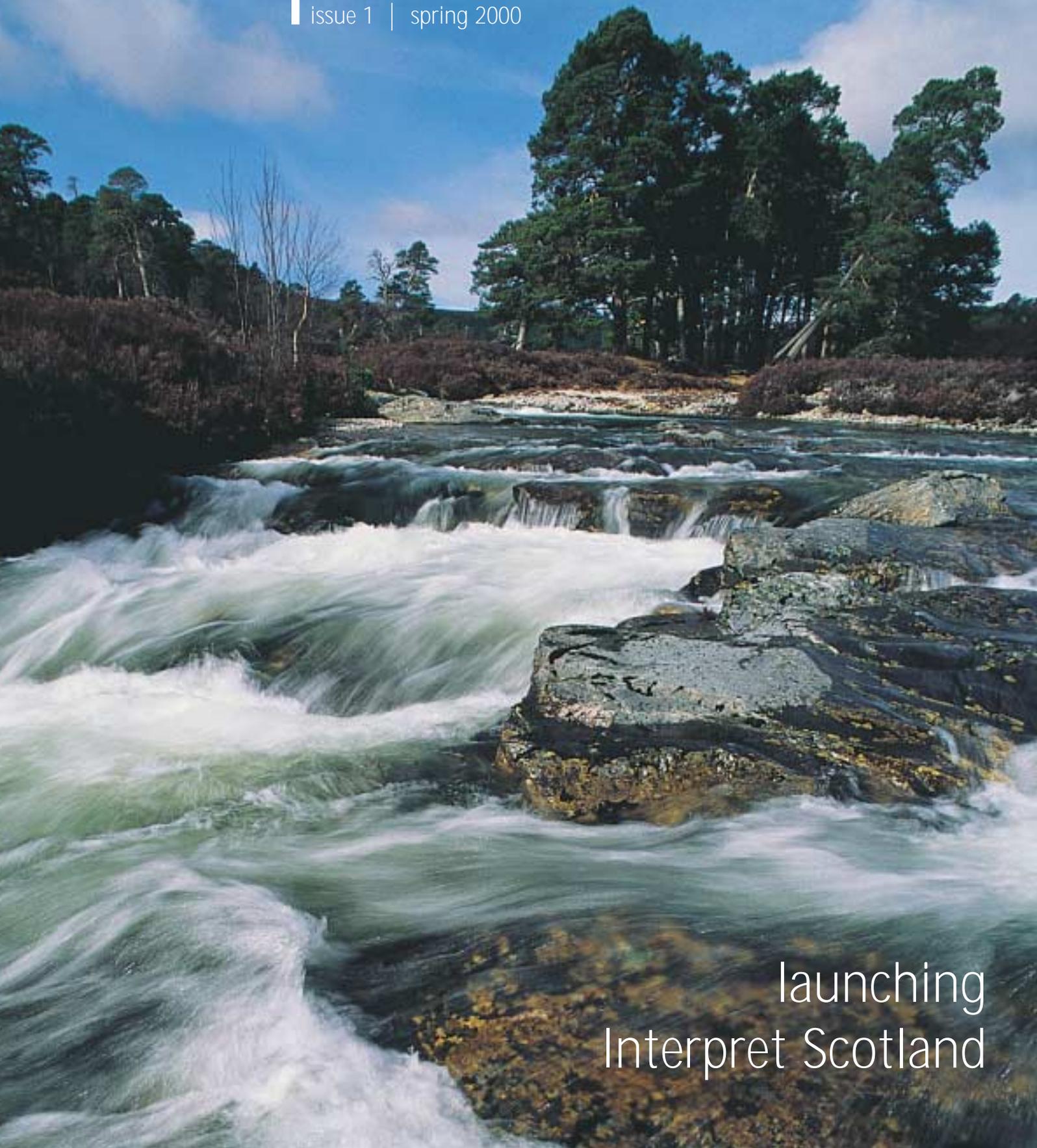


Tapping the Tourist Dollar
how interpretation
supports the tourist
economy

the journal for Scotland's Interpreters

Interpret Scotland

issue 1 | spring 2000



launching
Interpret Scotland

Interpret Scotland

Produced by Interpret Scotland

Issue 1: Launching Interpret Scotland: Spring 2000

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



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Next edition

The next edition of the journal will take a look at 'standards in interpretation'. Please contact the editor with any letters, news items and articles.

Copy deadline is 15 June 2000.

A Warm Welcome to Interpret Scotland

I wholeheartedly welcome the arrival of this new journal on interpretation, and the establishment of the Interpret Scotland group. I see these two initiatives as building on Scotland's long involvement with and use of interpretation, while at the same time recognising the need to constantly improve standards of planning and provision. This is essential if Scotland is to enter the 21st Century as a country able to communicate effectively with local people and visitors on issues of national importance.

The aim of interpretation is to engender peoples' interest in and concern for our natural and cultural heritage ... no easy task, but one that I feel can be achieved through greater collaboration between organisations and individuals with an interest in 'communicating' effectively.

This first issue lets the agencies and organisations with a responsibility to deliver interpretation explain what they are doing. However, the long-term credibility of the journal lies with you. For it to be able to promote good practice, share experience and reflect what is happening here in Scotland and elsewhere, the editorial team needs your input.

I look forward to seeing how the journal develops over the coming years, and I will be encouraging SNH to play its part in supporting and delivering high quality interpretation about the natural and cultural heritage.

John Markland, Chairman, Scottish Natural Heritage

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 Lorna Brown at Scottish Natural Heritage on 01738 444177 email: lorna.brown@snh.gov.co.uk

So what is this new journal all about?
All will be revealed, as we begin with a story about the dawn of partnership working...

telling stories and launching journals

Box world

Once upon a time, not so very long ago, the world was made of lots of separate boxes. In this world, every organisation lived in its own box, quietly minding its own business. Some of these boxes were big and shiny, whilst others were a bit tatty and neglected. The people inside these boxes went about their everyday work happy in their relative isolation.

But gradually the world began to change. The boxes started bumping into each other - making a few dents, changing shape and even swallowing each other up. As a result, the people inside started working together. The more they worked together, the more they realised how they depended on each other, and thus the age of partnership working dawned...

What do these boxes look like today? Well, they still exist, and very fine they are too. But they are now joined together by a large web of a strong new material called 'the common interest'. Interpret Scotland is one of the many threads in this web.

"Interpret Scotland is one of the many threads in this web"

At the same time as 'box world' evolved into a more co-ordinated beast, a specialist form of communication was gaining prominence: the art of interpretation.

To 'interpret' means 'to give meaning to'. As humans it is one of the most important things we do. We interpret the meaning of our lives in order to understand who we are, where we have come from, and where we might be going. As artists and scientists, planners and managers, producers and consumers, we are all instinctive interpreters, seeking meaning wherever it is to be found.

In our surroundings, there are many places, buildings, objects and events that have a special meaning. Even the ordinary and everyday has meaning - usually hidden, sometimes surprising, but always relevant. And in Scotland we are blessed with a wonderfully rich heritage.

A co-ordinated approach

Each Interpret Scotland organisation is involved with interpreting this rich heritage, and spending large sums of (mostly) public money doing so. We have come together to help each other in our common cause:

- ◆ to improve the quality and quantity of interpretation in Scotland;
- ◆ to promote co-ordination at local and strategic level;
- ◆ to share resources, expertise and experience to avoid duplicating effort.

Interpret Scotland's participating organisations are:

- ◆ Forest Enterprise
- ◆ Historic Scotland
- ◆ National Museum of Scotland
- ◆ Scottish Museums Council
- ◆ Scottish Natural Heritage
- ◆ The National Trust for Scotland
- ◆ The Scottish Parliament

Other organisations with a national remit in interpretation are welcome to join.

This journal, which will be produced twice a year, is a key output of Interpret Scotland. Its purpose is to report on, reflect, support and encourage interpretation in Scotland. We hope it will stimulate dialogue and debate, and will be of practical use to interpreters and others. Although in part a mouthpiece for the agencies, the journal belongs to all those concerned with interpretation in Scotland, and is being distributed free of charge on request.

"this journal will report on, reflect, support and encourage interpretation in Scotland"

We aim to *provoke* interest, *relate* to your needs, and *reveal* the latest developments. We also hope to show how good design and the use of writing techniques such as story telling, humour and metaphor can make interpretation more effective. Do let us know if we succeed.

Other activities of Interpret Scotland include the development of common training in interpretation under SNH's *Sharing Good Practice* programme, and the proposed establishment of a national interpretation resource / service.

If you want to find out more about Interpret Scotland, please contact any of the representatives listed opposite. If you have any comments about the journal, or want to contribute an article, letter or news item, please contact the editor. We particularly welcome material for the next edition, which will take a look at 'standards in interpretation'.

With best wishes from
Interpret Scotland.

Your guided tour starts here!
Good interpretation can be fun,
creative and memorable



Interpretation is essential to the conservation and enjoyment of Scotland's natural heritage, and is increasingly the focus for agency collaboration. Julie Forrest and Bob Jones review the state of play as a new century dawns...

the vital link

Interpretation within the Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage (and its predecessors) has been a constant factor within both agencies for more than a quarter of a century. As a tool for managing our respective sites, and for encouraging public support for our work, its effectiveness has long been recognised as unrivalled. However, as our budgets come under increasing pressure, it is more important than ever that interpreters trumpet the relevance of interpretation, and state clearly what it can achieve in terms of protecting and conserving our natural heritage and managed landscapes.

The Forestry Commission's involvement with interpretation goes back to the 1960's when it introduced the first interpretation centres to the British countryside. In the 1970's it championed the use of environmental arts as an interpretative medium in its ground-breaking work at Grizedale in the English Lakes. Meanwhile in Scotland, SNH through its predecessor body, the Countryside Commission for Scotland, was a key player in laying down the benefits and principles upon which much of the interpretation in Scotland has been based.

Today, staff from each agency continue to use and champion the use of interpretation to add value to a visit to Scotland's forest parks and nature reserves. By this means we seek to raise peoples' awareness of environmental issues. Issues such as climatic change, biodiversity, sustainable resources management – all big complex stories (and often inter-related!) - that need to be communicated effectively.

Collaboration between organisations and individuals to present a 'whole' rather than a fragmented story is becoming the norm, and at last recognises that the needs of the audience are becoming as important as raising the profile of the organisations funding the project. At Kilmartin Glen in west Argyll for instance, FE, SNH, and Historic Scotland are contributing to a programme to protect and raise awareness of a wonderful living, historical landscape. In Glenmore, beneath the mighty Cairngorms, the recently enlarged and refurbished Forest Park Visitor Centre is testimony to a collaboration between FE and SNH in developing a unique and slightly tongue-in-



Partnership in action - the Bennachie Forest Visitor Centre

cheek approach to interpreting an enormously complex landscape. At Bennachie on the eastern edge of the Grampians, at Kinloch on the Isle of Skye, in Culbin, in Sunart and throughout all parts of Scotland, similar agency co-operation is providing visitors and locals with facilities that it would not have been possible to provide if each organisation had worked in isolation.

The more we as agencies and providers can learn from one another about pitfalls and inventing wheels, the more we will be able to add value to the interpretation people encounter as they make their way around Scotland. As demonstrations of 'joined-up thinking', where several different agendas may have to be accommodated, interpretation can become the common ground – the vital link – a binding mortar between the partners. Interpret Scotland is another welcome manifestation of this joined-up thinking.

If interpretation is to be effective it must stimulate, it must focus on the relevant, it must relate to people's own experiences and interests. And it must seek a 'return', for only then can we measure whether we are succeeding in the delivery of our interpretative objectives – another way of expressing Tilden's founding principles of provoke, relate, reveal.

Julie Forrest, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel 01738 444177, and Bob Jones, Forest Enterprise, Tel 0131 334 0303

Partnership in action - the Glenmore Forest Park Visitor Centre



Interpretation is a vital part of managing and presenting our cultural heritage. Here Indira Mann and Chris Tabraham describe the approach taken at Bannockburn and Skara Brae.

Historic Scotland

bringing history to life



Too much visitor pressure will damage Skara Brae, where a new visitor centre is spreading the load

cry freedom!

What does Mel Gibson have to do with heritage conservation? Not much in the practical sense, but the 'Braveheart effect' on visitor numbers to our heritage centre at Bannockburn has been slow to diminish.

The National Trust for Scotland provides unrestricted access to the battle site and aims to provide an inspiring and educational experience. Those of us involved in visitor services are clear where interpretation fits in, and agencies like the NTS now recognise that interpretation is not just an 'add-on' but a vital tool in the management of heritage properties.

Interpretation at Bannockburn poses a number of challenges. Visitors to the battlefield today have little to see. The statue of Robert the Bruce is imposing, and Stirling Castle can be seen in the distance, but little remains of the medieval landscape and modern housing covers most of the battlesite. Bringing history to life is our first challenge.

The Bannockburn Heritage Centre has evolved over a number of decades and displays have been adapted and upgraded through time. Interpretation focuses on an emotive audio-visual programme, and life-size tableaux depict key events before and after the battle, such as the coronation of Robert the Bruce and the signing of the Declaration of Arbroath. We have also used replica and authentic medieval artefacts and illustrations to add to the story.

Recently, the Trust carried out an appraisal of the battlefield, and agreed that Bannockburn's symbolism has everything to do with spirit, passion, national identity and a sense of pride, rather than any tangible remains. We do not pretend to have addressed all the problems at Bannockburn. We do hope, however, that we meet visitors' expectations and provide them with a rounded, unbiased and, above all, interesting version of the Battle of Bannockburn. But, of course, history is open to interpretation, right, Mel?

Indira Mann, The National Trust for Scotland, Tel 0131 243 9359

Robert the Bruce's finest hour deserves good interpretation



an added stimulus

'Just bring your imagination' – that's what Historic Scotland's adverts ask you to do when you visit one of our 300-odd properties in care. Having an imagination certainly helps, but most visitors, not being walking encyclopaedias, want some stimulus for their imagination. That's where interpretation comes in.

Interpretation is seen as the key to unlocking the educational potential afforded by our properties. If we can facilitate enjoyment and foster understanding, then we can create a more informed appreciation of our built heritage and the wider cultural inheritance among the public at large.

Historic Scotland has been 'doing' interpretation for years – John Shanks (d.1844), 'drouthy cobbler' and custodian at Elgin Cathedral, is our first recorded 'live interpreter'. It's just that today we try to do it in a more organised fashion. Planning! Policies! Procedures! - that sort of thing.

Take Skara Brae, on Orkney - the best preserved stone-age village in north-west Europe. Hard to believe that it attracts over 60,000 visitors each year. Problem is, the site's so fragile. What do we do? Close it, and deprive visitors of a quite extraordinary experience, a unique insight into how remote ancestors lived 5,000 years ago? Surely not! What about controlling access to it? Better, but how do we achieve that?

Our answer was to provide an interpretive facility (with all the trimmings – toilets, café, retail) at some distance from the site. The hope was that no visitors would be discouraged from experiencing the site, but that they would spend *more* time at the facility and *less* time at the site. Both, in short, would benefit. The new facility opened in 1998 and signs are that the twin aims are being met.

It's early days in our drive towards a more vigorous interpretation strategy, but now at least the word 'interpretation' crops up in the most unusual places – a sure sign that it has 'arrived'; some of us are even beginning to understand what 'interpretation' means! Certainly it is of great benefit having a more open forum among all those working in the interpretation field in Scotland.

Finally, returning to that 'imagination' thing again. The last thing we wish to do is dispel that sense of discovery that every visitor scents on entering one of our properties. Unlike artificially-created experiences (no names - they know who they are!), we are guardians of something precious, something unique - something *real!* That is what our visitors are coming to see - not the interpretation. Good interpretation is the servant, not the master.

Chris Tabraham, Historic Scotland, Tel 0131 668 8600

The National Trust for Scotland



Stephen Richards and Fran Hegyi describe a radical new approach to museum curation and interpretation

The Twentieth Century Gallery contains many iconic images and objects chosen by the people of Scotland

constructing the twentieth century

National Museums of Scotland

At the top of the new Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh is a gallery that tells the story of the 20th Century through the eyes of the people. Nothing strange about that, you may say, except this particular exhibition gives the visiting public a major say on what is put on display.

Traditional museum practice relies on curators selecting objects from the museum's collections, and a team of designers and interpreters to create the exhibition. But in the Twentieth Century Gallery, we wanted to take a different approach...

We have become increasingly aware of the learning needs of our diverse audiences. This has included a reconsideration of both what people want from an exhibition, and how that exhibition is put together. One way of doing this is to employ an educational theory called Constructivism¹.

How we perceive knowledge influences the way we go about presenting an exhibition. Does knowledge exist independently of the learner; is it absolute, just waiting for us to discover it? Or, as Constructivists believe, is it there only in the mind of the knower? The way we learn can also be described in such extreme and opposing terms. Do we collect experiences, facts and information to produce knowledge? Or do we construct our own ways of organising information and stimuli around us, such as through language, to create knowledge?

"Can knowledge only exist in the mind of the knower?"

We can apply these questions to museums by allowing visitors to make their own meaning and connections with familiar objects, chosen by people like them rather than by curators. Since, in order for people to construct meaning, they must be able to connect it with what they already know, we have to accept that there is no one correct interpretation (the curatorial approach), and that people create their own knowledge and understanding from what is on display.

So in this climate of improved access and democratisation, the National Museums of Scotland abandoned the curatorial approach in developing the Twentieth Century Gallery, and tried a little Constructivism instead.

We took a radically different approach by asking the Scottish people to select items to be included in the exhibition. These could be anything they felt had dramatically affected life in Scotland this century, or reflected changes in their individual lives on a more personal level. People were also asked to say why they had made the choices they had. The idea was to create an exhibition for the people containing objects chosen by the people.

"The idea was to create an exhibition for the people containing objects chosen by the people"

The results can be viewed on level six of the museum, and contrast considerably with the other displays. The curator in charge of the Twentieth Century Gallery Project, Rose Watban, suggests that the foundations underlying the exhibition stem from questions which included: can we really understand the past through objects? Will people in the future understand life in the twentieth century through the objects displayed in the gallery? Have the wide range of people represented chosen typical objects, and for representative reasons? Were the choices dictated by cultural identity, geographical location, age, sex, social and economic position? Or, as we reach the end of the twentieth century, has a global culture started to emerge?

But what did the visitors think of the exhibition? We commissioned a visitor survey to coincide with the Edinburgh Festival, one of the busiest times in the museum's calendar. The results show that out of the 264 visitors surveyed, 36% thought it was excellent, 50% good, 11% average and 3% poor. These figures confirm the Constructivist interpretation approach was successful, but no more so than the traditional approach. This is apparent when comparing results of visitor responses from other galleries in the building where curators had chosen the display objects. However, the results suggest the visitor is willing to experience different approaches, and within a large museum like the Museum of Scotland, the change of approach may be necessary to provide variety and sustain interest during a long visit.

Stephen Richards, National Museums of Scotland, Tel 0131 225 7534, and Fran Hegyi, Scottish Museums Council, Tel 0131 229 7465

¹ See *The Educational Role of the Museum* edited by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, 1999. This book is reviewed on page 11.

Interpretation is a vital element of the tourist economy, and even modest improvements could pay substantial dividends. Bill Taylor and Duncan Bryden explain how.

tapping the tourist dollar



Historic re-enactments are an important part of the tourist experience at Fort George

A modest 1% extra tourist spending a year for 5 years will raise their annual expenditure by £33 million. We believe this modest increase can be achieved through better interpretation. Better interpretation will also add to Scotland's international competitiveness as we become a 'must see' destination in Europe for the growing band of older travellers, with high disposable income seeking self-improvement.

"Improved interpretation could boost Scotland's tourist economy by £33 million a year"

Whilst these figures are simplistic, they illustrate that interpretation can be a powerful force for economic benefit. Improving interpretation can also help home grown interpreters develop their writing, design and display skills, and retain investment within the Scottish economy. Unfortunately, it is not as easy to put a precise value on the economic return from interpretation as you can with retail and catering outlets. This has been one of the inherent problems with attributing true benefits from good interpretation, as interpretation rarely features as an independent budget head in business planning.

Interpretation can therefore play a significant role in moving towards sustainable tourism. It is not just about economic return and visitor enjoyment, but also about making links between the visitor, the communities they visit and the heritage resource. This is crucial in the face of declining primary industries that are slowly waking up to the need to interpret their activities to the visiting urban dweller. This can be better achieved through integration of how places are marketed, with the expectations of the visitor and the reality of what they find.

Marketing, signage, and publications all link with interpretation and site management to enhance visitors' experience, and to sustain heritage features and active communities. A total quality approach should apply just as much to the interpretation, as it does to accommodation and catering.

Bill Taylor, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel 01463 712221, and Duncan Bryden, Tourism and Environment Initiative, Tel 01463 244435

Scotland is a remarkable country, possessing one of the most diverse cultural, historical and natural mosaics of any in the World. Many of these features are globally recognised - Loch Ness, Edinburgh Castle, golf, whisky and tartan - and this mosaic forms the basis of one of our largest single economic sectors - tourism.

Overseas and domestic tourists visit Scotland for a whole range of reasons, but mainly to experience something different from their everyday life. Visitors often come to Scotland and find that many of their cultural and historical paradigms don't fit; they seek explanations for what they encounter. Why is that castle a ruin? Where are the forests? What does that name mean? Interpretation is the key to answering these inevitable questions.

Although Scots can be poorly informed about their own country, it is the 7.5 million visitors from outside Scotland who are most in need of explanations about our heritage. Foreign visitors particularly find our heritage of great interest: over 80% love the scenery; over 70% are intrigued by our castles, churches and museums, and 35% enjoy our wildlife. These are the very features that are different, that need

explanation, and for which a well told story greatly enhances their holiday experience.

The number of visitors to attractions where interpretation plays a key role is significant. Imagine what better interpretation at these sites will achieve? Will it lead to a longer stay and a more enjoyable experience? Of course! Will it result in visits to additional sites and greater expenditure? Probably!

Type of attraction	Number of visitors (1997)
Museums	3.5 million
Castles	3 million
Visitor centres	3 million
Galleries	1.5 million
Gardens	1.3 million
Zoos and aquaria	1 million
Total	13.3 million visitors

Based on these visitor figures, even a modest improvement in interpretive services could have a measurable impact on the economy. For example, we know that our 2 million overseas visitors spend an average of £460 per trip. Of these 70% visit a heritage site, or two, and contribute £650 million to the Scottish economy.

On this page we will report on recent developments in interpretation research and innovation. We welcome details of any interpretation research for the next edition.

research review



Glasgow Museums

Part of the experimental 'St Kilda: Living with the Land' display at the Kelvingrove Museum

A new flexible display system is tested at Kelvingrove

A new system of flexible 'permanent' displays is being developed and tested at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, the most visited British museum outside London. Lawrence Fitzgerald reports.

Like many Victorian Gothic museums, Kelvingrove is creaking at the joints. But thankfully, lottery funding is enabling us to invigorate our displays. The problem is that 'permanent' displays often end up with an inflexible rationale, theme and architecture. With a long gestation period for large projects, such displays can date quickly and need renewing a few years after completion. So is there an alternative?

A £25 million pound scheme was devised to refurbish the Kelvingrove museum. Our community and educational advisory panels, and a great deal of visitor research, suggested we should provide a range of experiences and cater for different learning styles - contemplative, hands-on, sad, stirring, fun etc. However, if the public's involvement in shaping the displays was going to be more than a one-off exercise, and we were to have the ability to incorporate new research, then displays simply had to be flexible - both physically and intellectually.

As a one-off capital project, we wanted the new displays to be capable of change. To do this we had to abandon ideas of large linear narrative

galleries that fix collections and interpretation, and instead focus on specific 'stories' that arise out of the objects and visitor interests. These stories would be grouped within gallery themes chosen to reflect the strengths of the collection and visitor interest, and as an aid to orientation, rather than traditional academic themes. Thus both the 'story displays' and themes would change over time. Around 80% of the gallery space would be devoted to 120 story displays with 8 story changes each year. The rest of the display space would be devoted to four Discovery rooms: hands-on areas; a Display Study Centre; open storage with research facilities; and two Object Cinemas - son et lumiere type displays mixing objects, light, sound and projection.

The first phase of a prototype flexible story display system has now been developed and evaluated, focusing on two 'stories' - 'Introduction to Italian Renaissance Art' and 'St. Kilda: Living with the land'. The idea was to create standardised modules that could be arranged in different ways that were capable of containing a mix of all likely objects and media, but could also accommodate bespoke finishes and graphics to avoid a 'trade show' look. The key modules were the case, table, bench, screen and slab.

The idea has proved very popular, with over 75% of respondents in the evaluation rating the design of the displays as good or very good. The results of both the public and technical evaluation will inform a second phase of development and evaluation, to test additional elements and to refine the production brief, planned for March - April 2000.

Lawrence Fitzgerald, Glasgow Museums,
Email: lawrence.fitzgerald@cls.glasgow.gov.uk

A new study of teaching and research in interpretation is published by SNH

A recent review of teaching and research in interpretation has highlighted the widespread take-up of this subject by the education sector. The study, commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage and the University of the Highlands and Islands, examined the teaching of interpretation at higher education level within the British Isles. Its key findings include:

- ◆ Over 1,200 UK students graduate each year having studied at least one unit or module on interpretation. After graduation, 52% of postgraduates and 27% of undergraduates gain employment in a related field.
- ◆ Interpretation is taught as a unit or module in its own right on at least 59 degrees covering a range of subjects. 34 are postgraduate degrees, 20 are undergraduate,

and 5 are further education level courses (HND etc.).

- ◆ Subjects where interpretation is taught as a unit or module in its own right include: heritage studies; museum studies; tourism; archaeology; countryside management; leisure management; exhibitions design; and building conservation.
- ◆ At least 59 academic staff working in UK higher education regard interpretation as one of their specialist areas.
- ◆ At least 253 pieces of interpretation research (including refereed papers, journal articles, books and conference proceedings) have been published by UK authors in the last 5 years.
- ◆ Most research examines interpretation as part of a wider study, and there is relatively little work on interpretation in its own right. Of the research specific to interpretation, most is evaluative or is seeking to appraise the merits of different media. Very little research has taken place on the impacts of interpretation on economic activity, or on visitor attitudes and behaviour.

Copies of the report *A Review of Interpretation Teaching and Research in the British Isles* are available from Scottish Natural Heritage publications section, Tel: 01738 444177.

New research studentships in interpretation are underway

Several interpretation research studentships are underway at the University of the Highlands and Islands. Subjects under study include:

- ◆ The development of measures of quality in interpretation, and the applicability of and suitability of quality assessment for interpretive facilities.
- ◆ The challenge and effectiveness of multi-lingual interpretation, and guidelines on good practice.
- ◆ The use of technology as an interpretive medium.

Contact Bill Taylor, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel: 01463 712221

Interpret Scotland Letters

Points to raise? Appeals to make? Spleen to vent? Share your opinions with the 1,000+ readers of Interpret Scotland. Please note that letters may be edited for length and clarity.

letters

Dear Interpret Scotland

In Defence of Place

(Provoke)...As interpreters we have it in our power to do untold damage to the cultural and physical landscapes of Scotland. Too often, agencies and funders see interpretative projects as 'quick-hits', opportunities for 'instant fixes'. The ubiquitous panel in particular is a highly visible, tangible, and (in relative terms) cheap option, which executive officers or elected officials can point to and claim to be discharging their agencies objectives.

(Relate)...With panels in particular, a scatter-gun mentality is prevalent. Every viewpoint, historic steading, skirmish site, or visible legacy of our industrial heritage – the more tumble-down the better – has to be imbued with an expanse of polycarbonate, trendy typography, hastily conceived reconstruction drawing and, too often, turgid text authored by the uninformed or over-informed – or so it seems. And time after time the most important elements on the panel appear to be the plethora of site managers and funders' logos. Indeed, anybody – and their Scottish ancestor! – who can claim to have any 'ownership' whether it be truly custodial responsibility, a financial stake, or a protective interest in the site, must have their mark. The panel itself is often in truth a corporate mark proclaiming territory and custodianship.

This corporate 'scent-marking' does little for the integrity and sanctity of place. Place, which may be a landscape in which real people once lived, laughed, cried, and died. Place, which may be the scene of momentous social change, suffering, deprivation, or inspiration. Place, which may be fragile, endangered, or simply awesome. Place, which as interpreters we appear driven to package, to explain the meaning of every nuance, to draw out every tabloid detail. And to do so in six languages! All to be endorsed by our corporate stamp(s)...our corporate egos' thus appeased.

(Reveal)...I generalise, yes. I ride roughshod over much sterling and intelligent, sometimes sensitive work, yes. But there are many examples out there of what I speak...and I may even have to own up to one or two by my own hand. However, I contest that Scotland is not so large that interpretative saturation through such media is not a real threat. And this will be at the expense of a more insightful, and therefore meaningful approach.

What to do?

- ◆ Become less concerned with the superficial, with the immediately evident or obvious.
- ◆ Become more concerned with, and respectful of, the memory of place
- ◆ Become more concerned with a collective, sharing approach.
- ◆ Above all, approach our 'landscapes' with a light-touch philosophy, a minimalist approach.



Engaging the user and reducing 'clutter' in the countryside - an early SignalSign at work

By way of example, in Forest Enterprise we have recently coined the term 'non-invasive signing' – typified by our SignalSign and SackSign developments. An apparent contradiction in terms – surely signs are designed to be noticed? Yes, but in the field of interpretation they can be so much more effective if the viewer has to actually engage with the sign structure in order to 'receive' the message which is otherwise discretely hidden, or with appropriate prompting, has to seek it out.

We should (collectively) think also of declaring interpretation-free zones. Perhaps all terrain above the x metre contour? Perhaps the sea (and loch?) floors? That is not to say that such places should not be interpreted at all – but there are other ways to do so than on or in such sites. These may be off-site, at point of entry, or through web-sites or other IT media.

And, beyond inclusion of some quiet attribution to facilitate an enquiry path, do we really need to rubber-stamp everything with our big bold corporate logos? What are we trying to say with these marks (other than trying perhaps to outdo one another) in the 'engaging' or 'caring' stakes?

Scotland once led the way in 'enlightenment' – is there now a need for a new enlightenment in how we care for and present our heritage?

Bob Jones

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National Association of Interpretation USA

The largest national body of interpreters is the US National Association of Interpretation. The NAI can trace its roots back to the 1950's, and currently has over 3,800 members from the US, Canada and twenty other countries. Its services include national and regional workshops, certification programmes, a regular magazine and newsletter, the *Journal of Interpretation Research*, a job-listing service, scholarships, and a web site. The Association holds a major national workshop each year, with this year's planned for November 7-12 in Tucson, Arizona. For details about NAI, see their web site at <http://www.interpnet.com>

what's up elsewhere?

On this page we report on interpretation news south of the Border, and even further afield. We start in deepest, darkest Brazil...

The Brazil/Great Britain Conference on Heritage and Development

In October 1999 the Brazil/Great Britain Conference on Heritage and Development was held in Recife in the north-east of Brazil. It was organised and co-ordinated by the British Council.

The aim of the conference was to discuss the emerging demands on people in the heritage field, and to address key topics such as strategies for cultural promotion, funding, models for site management, the role of the media, community involvement and employment opportunities. The event was attended by over 150 people, including 6 from the UK.



Rona Gibb
Olinda World Heritage Site in Recife, Brazil – the focus for the conference, and hopefully future interpretation

The programme included a combination of site visits and presentations from a wide spectrum of interests, ranging in size from small community groups to national organisations. Many discussions centred on the built heritage – churches, sugar plantations etc, but with very little consideration of the natural heritage and the opportunities to tie these together. Much of the emphasis from the UK delegates was focused on partnership working, developing uses for buildings and sites to make them economically viable and benefit the local community, and integrating the

interpretation of the built, cultural and natural heritage.

The conference was a great success for all those concerned. Many different approaches were discussed and the sheer enthusiasm that was shown by those attending was overwhelming. A new project with UK/Brazil co-operation is now being planned, and it is hoped this will bring benefits for all involved.

If you want to find out more about the event, contact Rona Gibb, Highland Interpretive Strategy Project Officer, Tel 01463 244437

A European Interpretation Network is born

The seed of a European interpretation network was sown at an international workshop hosted by Bournemouth University in July 1999. *Heritage Interpretation in Europe* was organised by the Association for Heritage Interpretation and funded by Duchas, the Irish Heritage Service. Its purpose was to review the status of interpretation in Europe, and discuss the establishment of a permanent European network of practitioners and supporting organisations. Over 80 participants attended from 14 countries, although nearly 50 more expressed an interest in the workshop but could not attend, representing another 7 countries. A total of 29 papers were presented, covering theoretical as well as practical topics. A particularly important contribution was made by the Council of Europe, whose cultural and environmental divisions (including Centre Naturopa), recognise interpretation as an important tool in developing their future programmes.

During the latter stages of the workshop, discussion groups debated the basis for and implications of setting up a European network. In the report-back, support for the idea was overwhelming, and it was agreed that the idea should be developed over the succeeding year (1999/2000). Chris Wood at Bournemouth University was asked to liaise with other key participants, and investigate possible working arrangements and funding, and report back to a second workshop in summer 2000. Participants warmed to an idea that the summer 2000 meeting should be held in association with the Centre Naturopa's proposed European conference on Environmental Communications, marking the closing of the CoE's current campaign *Europe, A Common Heritage*.

For information about the development of the network and the summer 2000 workshop, contact Chris Wood, School of Conservation Sciences, Bournemouth University, Tel: 01202 595134, E-mail: cwood@bournemouth.ac.uk. The 1999 workshop proceedings will be published in the New Year.

Happy Birthday to the Association of Heritage Interpretation!

The Association of Heritage Interpretation (formally the Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage) is 25 years old this year. When the Society was formed in 1975, interpretation was a new-fangled American idea, and our heritage was being ploughed up or bulldozed at break-neck speed. A lot has changed since then, and the Association has played a central role in promoting the profession in the UK.

Benefits of AHI membership include the *Interpretation* journal, a regular newsletter, reduced rates at conferences, seminars and workshops, and entries in the membership and consultants directory. The Association also runs the Interpret Britain awards, which have become a fixture in the heritage calendar, and give deserved recognition to high quality and innovative interpretation. For membership details, contact thp2e Membership Administrator, PO Box 6541, Warley B65 0AP Tel: 0121 559 2022

Calling all Scottish interpreters...are you interested in SIN

In 1998 a group of Scottish interpreters and policymakers met together to discuss their concerns. The result was the establishment of the fledgling Scottish Interpretation Network (SIN), and the commissioning of a report to identify the main issues facing future interpretation in Scotland. The key aim of SIN is to aid networking amongst interpreters in Scotland. To achieve this, and to complement Interpret Scotland, SIN are planning an email discussion group, bulletin board and web site for Scottish interpreters. A conference event is also proposed for later in the year. For details, contact Hugh Muschamp (hugh@muschamp.softnet.co.uk), David Masters (dmasters@qmuc.ac.uk), or Bill Taylor (bill.taylor@snh.gov.uk).

news and events

Disability Discrimination Act comes into force

Providing physical and intellectual access to people with disabilities is now a legal duty under the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act. From 1 October 1999, all 'service providers' (including heritage sites, visitor centres, museums, galleries and other interpretive facilities open to the public) must:

- ◆ make reasonable adjustments to policies, procedures and practice so as not to discriminate against those with disabilities;
- ◆ provide auxiliary aids and services to make a service more accessible;
- ◆ provide an alternative way of making goods, facilities and services available to disabled people where a physical feature makes the service inaccessible.

A more inclusive approach to interpretation will benefit a wider audience. For example, large point-size text in graphics helps both the one million people with visual impairments in the UK, and makes reading more comfortable for everyone. Pictures with clear captions in place of text tell a story to everyone, especially those with learning difficulties, and help keep overall text matter more concise. Audio facilities can be used in parallel with text. A CD-ROM in a visitor centre can provide a 'virtual visit' to parts of a historic property where universal access is impossible. Providing plenty of opportunities to sit down helps not only those with walking difficulties but anyone suffering from 'museum feet'.

Many of the ideas behind inclusive planning make good interpretive common sense. By planning inclusively, wherever it is feasible, interpreters will provide accessible, enjoyable interpretation for everyone. For copies of the *Disability Discrimination Act Code of Practice* and other information on the DDA, contact the helpline on 0345 622633 or see their website: www.disability.gov.uk



Forest Life Picture Library

Events

Interpretation Training in Scotland

SNH is finalising details of the forthcoming *Sharing Good Practice* training programme. The programme aims to cover a range of topics from interpretive planning to environmental art and interpretive writing.

Contact Lorna Brown, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel: 01738 444177

SNH annual conference

12-14 September 2000, Glasgow

'The responsible enjoyment and understanding of the natural heritage'. Contact Debbie Greene, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel: 0131 446 2469

Selling Geology to the Public

Scottish Natural Heritage

1-2 March 2000, *Dynamic Earth*, Edinburgh
£60 (excluding overnight accommodation)

Contact Lorna Brown, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel: 01738 444177

Wild, Wet and Wonderful

SNH's touring exhibition about Scottish Boglands
14th April - 3 Sept 2000, *Kelvingrove, Glasgow*

Contact John Walters, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel: 01463 723100

Visitor Centres – inspiration and innovation?

Losehill Training, 5 June 2000, Losehill Hall, Castleton, Derbyshire, £130.00

Contact Sue Davies, Losehill Hall, Tel: 01433 620373

Organising programmes of guided walks and events

Losehill Training, 27-28 November, Losehill Hall, Castleton, Derbyshire. £225.00

Contact Sue Davies, Losehill Hall, Tel: 01433 620373

Publications

What Have We Got and Is It Any Good? – A practical guide on how to survey and assess heritage interpretation

The Highland Interpretive Strategy Project (2000)
£15.00 (including disc copy and sample questionnaires)

The Highland Interpretive Strategy Project has produced an inventory of interpretation across the Highland Council area, including an assessment of the quality of existing provision. In response to demands for information about the survey methodology, the Project has published a 'how-to-do-it' manual complete with a disc copy of the questionnaires. Contact Highland Interpretive Strategy Project, Tel: 01463 244437

The Educational Role of the Museum (second edition)

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (ed.) (1999), Routledge.
ISBN 0415 198267, 346pp, £21.00

This comprehensive reference text has been thoroughly revised and updated. It addresses a range of theoretical and practical issues organised into sections on 'communication theory', 'learning in museums', 'developing effective exhibitions', and 'thinking about museum studies'. The section on communication and learning theory will be of particular interest to experienced interpreters wanting to refresh their understanding of the learning processes underlying interpretation.

Access in Mind: towards the inclusive museum

Ann Rayner (1998), The Intellectual Access Trust, Edinburgh

ISBN 1 901663 18 3, 140 pp, £10.00 (£5.00 to members of the Museums and Galleries Disability Association).

This excellent publication describes how to improve access to displays in museums, galleries and outdoors for people with learning or communication disabilities. It contains practical guidance on aspects such as 'learning in museums', 'labels and signs' and 'interpretation'. It explains the approach taken by 8 pilot projects, covers a range of media, and addresses management issues such as consultation with learning disabled users.

Available from NMS Publishing, Royal Museum of Scotland, Tel: 0131 247 4062

On the back page we will report on case studies of interpretation projects breaking new ground or meeting new needs. We begin with a travelling exhibition and the Scottish Parliament.

the back page report



when is a Parliament not a Parliament?

The Scottish Parliament Visitor Centre opened on May 17 1999, just 11 days after the elections. It is an information resource for the public, and will stay on George IV Bridge until Parliament locates to Holyrood.

The centre has 3 rooms focusing on different aspects of the Parliament. Each room has a different design style to present its message. Overall we have taken a very modern, clean and bright approach. Room 1 is a bold introduction with graphics suggesting the 'information age'. As the subject matter we are interpreting is fairly heavy, we have lightened the presentation with the use of icons for the graphics. These were supplemented with photos as they became available.

Room 2 presents the Holyrood building project to an increasingly curious audience. A large-scale architect's model is the centrepiece, complemented by an "advent calendar" wall. The latter will chart the full progress of the building over the next two years.

In Room 3 we use a set of facsimile documents to enhance our presentation of the historical context. These were expertly crafted by Tim Chalk and provide a visually attractive contrast to the present and future as portrayed in Rooms 1 & 2.

Through the interpretation, we pose several main questions that are answered with different levels of information. Multi-media presentations are used to present information that will need most regular updating – such as MSP biographies and committee detail. A travelling version of the display has been produced to take to other venues, for example with the Parliament's committees when they meet outside Edinburgh.

The main target audience for the Centre is the Scottish electorate. The Royal Mile location means that the interpretation needs to be meaningful for visitors from the rest of the UK and overseas. An information desk is staffed during opening hours.

The Centre has welcomed over 25,000 visitors in the first six months and the displays are meeting the majority of our client's information needs.

Rosemary Everett, The Scottish Parliament, Tel 0131 348 5393

history you can handle!

The National Museums of Scotland is expanding its highly successful interactive approach to exhibition design with a new travelling project called "Discovery on the Move". The exhibition encourages the public to develop their investigative skills by becoming actively involved in their own past.

The exhibition will focus on interactive learning, helping visitors discover for themselves how evidence is used to find out about the past. Catering for a wide range of learning styles and abilities, it will strive to inspire visitors to use their newly acquired skills to increase their understanding and enjoyment of other museum displays.

An introductory unit will present the public with the different types of evidence used to find out about the past. There will be a computer access point containing information about the National Museums' collections and services. An open display unit will also allow local communities to develop their own exhibition. We hope the visitor will leave the exhibition with a better understanding of the subject, and skills in investigating evidence.

The exhibition aims to raise awareness of museum collections, and will visit a whole variety of venues including local museums, schools and community centres. The physical nature of these venues means that we need a flexible system which can be easily set up and yet still give the visitor the impression of entering a defined space. The exhibition is being constructed of robust, lightweight materials, and each of the six modules forms a compact unit which opens out like a transformer toy into an exhibition space.

The exhibition will give access to NMS collections for those beyond easy reach of Edinburgh, and help develop new audiences for local museums. The exhibition is being designed to meet the needs of the 5-14 curriculum and schools will be one of its main user groups. It will also be a stimulating environment for families, community groups and visitors who do not normally visit museums. The exhibition will pilot its first tour in April 2000.

Jane Fletcher, National Museums of Scotland, Tel 0131 247 4199