



Adventures in a box  
Glasgow's Open  
Museum



Take a closer look  
How well do you know  
your audience?



A matter of learning?  
A look at interpretation  
for adults with learning  
difficulties



Mind your  
language!  
Writing for a  
local audience

the journal for Scotland's Interpreters

# Interpret Scotland

issue 3 | spring 2001

Thinking about  
our audience



# Interpret Scotland

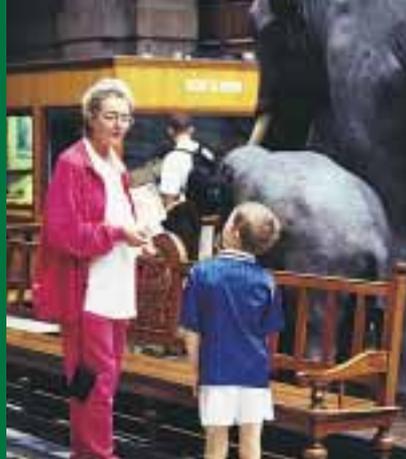
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Interpret Scotland is an inter-agency initiative that seeks to:

- ◆ 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



Scottish Museums Council

audience *noun*.  
People giving or likely to give their attention to something. From the Latin 'audio' meaning 'to hear'

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## Next edition

The next edition of the journal will take a look at 'Evaluating interpretation'. Please contact the editor with any letters, news items and articles. Copy deadline is 15 July 2001.

## Thinking about our audience

Who are our audience? What is this nebulous mass of people, united only by their collective term? How do we interpret successfully for such diversity?

Heritage attractions have widely differing audiences, not just between ages and sexes, ethnic origin and special needs, but varying from day to day, month to month and season to season. In order for us to be successful in attracting and maintaining our visitors, we need to know what they want and expect from us. In order to do this, we need to know who they are.

Tom Costley suggests how we might 'take a closer look' at our audiences on the opposite page. His article sets the scene for further case studies and examples in the journal, ranging from attracting new minority audiences at Culross (p4), to interpreting for people with learning disabilities (p5) and working with marginalised urban communities (p 7). All of these show how we can make our interpretation relevant to a wider range of audiences.

One issue we feel is worthy of further debate is the use of Gaelic translations in Gaelic speaking areas. Michael Glen elaborates on his experience of Gaelic, Doric and other local languages on p6. But are there other approaches? We would welcome your views and comments - on this and any other matter.

Finally, and crucially, the issue of 'audiences' is as huge and varied a topic as our audience themselves: we could not hope to cover every aspect in one edition. Defining and meeting the real needs of our audience is at the very heart of what we try to do.

Caroline Tempest, The National Trust for 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](mailto:eilidh.strang@snh.gov.uk)

My performance was a complete success. The audience was a failure. *Anonymous thespian*

# Taking a closer look

How well do you know your visitors? It's easy to make assumptions about who they are and what they want, but the success of any interpretation depends on whether it meets their needs.

This article will help you take a closer look at your visitors, and to ensure your interpretation is relevant to them. Typically, you would want to know more about:

- ◆ Who they are
- ◆ What they're interested in
- ◆ What they already know
- ◆ What they think about your existing provision

You can do this by using information you already have, and by doing a visitor survey. Here's how:

## 1. Use existing information

Information you might already collect can provide valuable insights into your audience, allowing you to identify different 'visitor types' or 'market segments'. For example, if you charge admission your till should contain data about ticket type (e.g. adult, family) and throughput (e.g. at different times of day). Visitors can also be asked a simple question by admission staff about where they are from.

If your facility has no admission charge, basic information can be collected by automatic people counters, and by observations or counts by members of staff.

## 2. Face-to-face interviews

Face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of visitors are the most effective form of visitor survey.

Such interviews allow for controlled sampling, ensuring that the interviewees are representative of your audience as a whole. Visitors are usually randomly selected by interviewing the next person to leave the facility after each interview is finished. If a group leaves together, the 'next birthday' rule ensures that the person whose birthday is next becomes the respondent, not simply the loudest in the group. Such exit interviews should last no more than 10 minutes to stop the respondents getting bored and resentful.

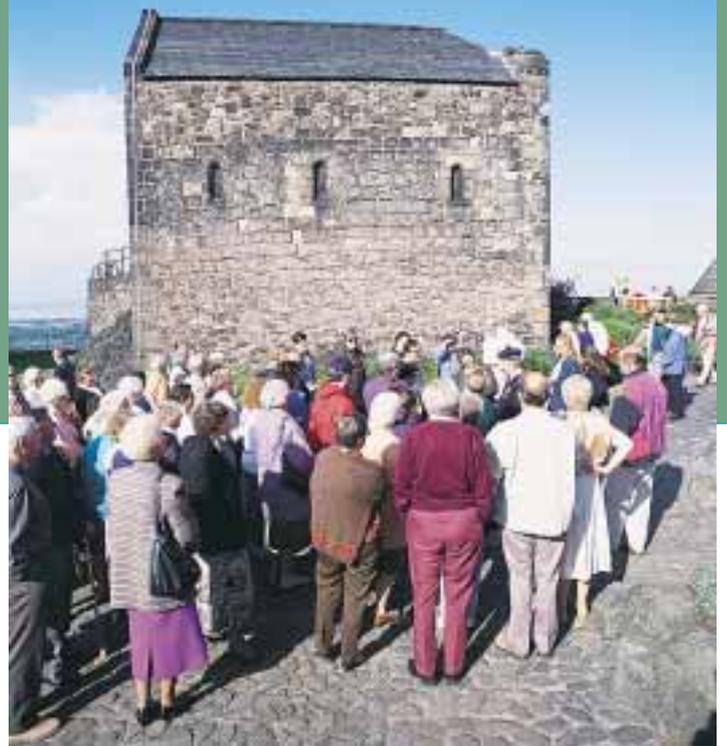
**"face-to-face interviews with a representative sample of visitors are the most effective form of visitor survey"**

The disadvantage of visitor interviews is the cost of using experienced interviewers. While it is possible to use your existing staff, they need to be trained - and in my experience can find it very difficult to remain neutral when asking questions about their facility.

## 3. Use self-completion questionnaires

Self-completion questionnaires are filled in by your visitors, and are therefore cheaper than face-to-face interviews. The questionnaires are usually handed to visitors when they enter, and it is best to give one to each visitor group rather than to each individual. You should explain why you are doing the survey and where they should leave their completed questionnaire.

There are two issues to be aware of here. Firstly, you need to ensure that the respondent who completes the questionnaire is not the dominant



Crown copyright: Historic Scotland

*Take a closer look at these visitors to Edinburgh Castle: Who are they? What do they want? What interests them most?*

member of the group (e.g. a parent), which will skew the results. You can use the 'next birthday' rule here. Secondly, those who are either very satisfied or very dissatisfied might be more or less likely to complete a questionnaire than the 'average' visitor. This can also skew the results. As a guide, a well-designed and clearly explained questionnaire should have a response rate of around 50%; significantly less and there may be something wrong with your survey design.

## 4. Plan it properly!

If you are designing any kind of visitor survey, please seek advice. Organisations like the Tourist Boards, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Forestry Commission have experience of visitor research, and some have published guides on doing visitor surveys.

**"if you are designing a visitor survey questionnaire, please seek advice"**

Whether you use face-to-face interviews or a self-completion questionnaire, an initial piloting of the questionnaire is essential to identify any questions that are ambiguous or difficult to answer.

You also need to consider the data processing. Your staff may be willing to conduct interviews or distribute questionnaires, but can they do the analysis? Do you have the resources to tabulate several hundred responses? If someone external is going to do the analysis, get them involved at the questionnaire design stage to ensure there are no unforeseen problems later on.

## 5. Qualitative research and external surveys

Qualitative research in the form of group discussions (i.e. focus groups) is very useful in establishing audience reaction and their ideas about what you are doing. External surveys of potential visitors (e.g. on a local High Street) can also be useful in establishing their awareness of your facility and, if they are not visiting, their reasons for choosing other places to go.

But let's not run before we can walk. Adopting the old adage of it being easier and cheaper to retain an existing customer than to attract a new one, a better understanding of your existing audience is a sensible start for a foray into market research.

**Tom Costley, System Three (audience research consultants)**  
Tel 0131 221 9933

NB. See page 8 for details about using IT for visitor surveys

"Make sure you have finished speaking before your audience has finished listening"

Dorothy Sarnoff. Author, actress and speech consultant

# A guiding question

"How much do I need to know? How much do I need to tell?" The fundamental question for any tour guide is only answered by changing the question to "How much do they want to know? How much do they want to hear?"

Knowing our audience is vital. As tour guides, we need to know who they are and where they're from. Only then can we make the information relevant to them. A tour will be different for children and adults,

historians and archaeologists, geologists and architects, conference delegates and incentive visitors, locals and overseas visitors. The site **does not change**, but our interpretation of it does.

Why are they here – because they really are interested? To get out of the rain? To keep the children quiet for an hour? It doesn't actually matter – we now have an opportunity to convince them that their decision was the right one.

"if we're not striking oil, we should stop boring!"

A good guide will be able to make the audience feel part of the site. "Look down that loch, can you imagine how the people felt as they saw the Viking longboats approach?" "Why do you think they built here?" And so on.

Our audience won't care how much we know until they know how much we care – about them and the environment. We may be passionate about the subject, whilst they may just have a passing interest. If we're not striking oil, we should stop boring! But if we get it right, they'll know what they wanted to know, will have heard what they wanted to hear, and will come back for more.

Rosalind Newlands, Training Manager, Scottish Tourist Guides Association, Tel 01786 447784



Guided tours, and their audiences, come in all shapes and sizes - like this boat tour round Beachy Head.

Heritage Coast Forum

## A Hebrew saga at Culross



When I was property manager at Culross Palace I took on a student placement to help us look at our visitors and their experience of what we provided.

History bubbles out of every nook and round every corner at Culross, and it attracts a wide range of visitors. Culross is one of the three places in Scotland highly recommended by the internationally known Michelin guide. This mix was what attracted Louise to conduct her studies for her degree course. She studied the workings of the National Trust for Scotland, and then tried to identify the type of visitor that Culross appealed to and how the NTS could improve the visitor experience.

Louise drew up a questionnaire to collate the information she needed. Armed with this, she interviewed visitors as they left the attraction. A great deal of this confirmed what we already knew. But for Louise it was all new, and she was able to look at the results with fresh eyes. She selected specific areas for attention, one of which was the way we dealt with small ethnic groups. As a result of this she discovered we were receiving non - English speaking visitors from Israel. We were used to Israeli visitors speaking with an American accent, but had not noticed that some groups had difficulty understanding English.

The result of the survey was puzzling, and the explanation given to us by the group's interpreter was a surprise. "Its because the Berlin wall came down" he said. He went on to explain that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, travel restrictions on Jews from the eastern block had been lifted. Many had since emigrated to Israel and set up successful businesses, providing them with disposable income they now wished to spend on educational travel. They could possibly speak five or six languages, but not English.

We then asked our Education and Interpretation Department for some interpretation in Hebrew. There was surprise at this request, but they pulled out the stops and found a Hebrew speaker who could help. A number of difficulties arose in translating broad Scots into Hebrew, but eventually it was done, and we added to our foreign language texts. Now, without any promotion and purely by word of mouth, non-English speaking Israeli visitors have increased substantially – all thanks to a student placement and some creative analysis of our visitors.

Michael Ford, The National Trust for Scotland, Tel 01333 720271

"Condense some daily experience into a glowing symbol, and the audience is electrified"

Ralph Waldo Emerson. Poet and writer (1803 – 1882)

# A matter of learning?

Not all audiences are able to read and understand as easily as you or I. People with learning or communication disabilities in particular can find interpretation inaccessible, and it is essential we cater much better for this group - and by doing so we will benefit a much wider audience.

There are over one million adults with a learning disability in the UK - more than the number of wheel chair users. A high percentage already visit museums, galleries and visitor attractions in small groups or with their family, looking for meaningful ways of passing their time. Like the rest of us, they have varied interests and many are seeking sources of inspiration for other pursuits such as art, music or drama.

Heritage institutions are now trying to encourage a wider range of visitors, including those who may feel that such places are 'not for the likes of us' and perceive them as dull and boring. Furthermore, the Disability Discrimination Act specifically includes people with learning disabilities, so there is now a legal duty to consider this particular audience.

Research done by the Intellectual Access Trust (INTACT) shows that improving interpretation for visitors with learning disabilities will help many other audiences. For example, making information more accessible helps those with any kind of educational disadvantage, those whose first language is not English, those with a visual impairment, and those with conditions such as dyslexia.

The following ideas are relevant in a variety of contexts from museums and galleries to outdoor facilities:

- ◆ Audio information in clear and simple language can help many visitors who prefer not to have to read.
- ◆ Things to touch are appreciated by all, though they are particularly useful for those whose other channels of information are restricted.
- ◆ Things to smell or taste are more difficult in a museum context, but may be appropriate to an outdoor situation.

Though written information is essential, it should not be the sole approach, and it must be easily legible in a clear font, large enough to be read without peering. Straightforward language and a strong story line or appropriate structure helps understanding, and pictures, maps, diagrams and symbols can all supplement this.

"text must be easily legible in a clear font,  
large enough to be read without peering"

If short paragraphs in a hierarchical structure are used, visitors should be able to understand the main message quickly and decide for themselves how much to read. Strategies such as posing a question or highlighting a 'human interest' angle can catch visitors' attention and help them relate to what you want to say.



*This part of the estate is rich in bird song. This is also where to listen for small mammals hiding among the leaf litter.*



City of Edinburgh Council

An extract from The City of Edinburgh Council's Cammo Estate sensory trail leaflet-aimed at people with learning and communication difficulties

Our evaluation report *Did Anyone Notice?* featured a number of museums and galleries in Scotland that have set out to help this audience. Good examples include the following:

- ◆ Elgin Museum ran a very successful exhibition called *Using your Senses*, which included items to touch.
- ◆ Hawick Museum is a vital resource for local community groups who are regularly consulted by museum staff.
- ◆ The Collins Gallery at Strathclyde University runs regular workshops for special needs groups, many integrated with 'mainstream' provision. Staff here find that visitors with learning disabilities respond very positively to elements such as colour and shape, and to the emotional context of modern art.
- ◆ The City of Edinburgh Council Recreation Department is working with staff from the Social Work department's Bonnington Symbol System on leaflets for the Cammo Estate and on signage at the City Art Centre and Leith Library. You can see an example of their approach in the illustration above.
- ◆ The National Museums of Scotland are looking at modest ways to improve some of the older displays in the Royal Museum. They are consulting people with learning disabilities about information in larger print and plain English for part of the large animal display, as well as providing some specimens to touch.

"visitors with learning disabilities respond very positively to colour and shape, and to the emotional context of modern art"

Catering for an audience with learning disabilities need not be expensive, particularly if it is planned as part of a new display or of a refurbishment programme. Neither should it be seen as patronising since not all the information needs to be made simple: it is a matter of an inclusive approach and of thinking how to make information more accessible to all.

Ann Raynor, INTACT, Tel 0131 337 6001

Editor's note: We received a number of comments about the difficulty of reading the yellow text in the last edition of Interpret Scotland. We are committed to producing a journal that is interesting, stimulating, relevant, and above all, accessible to our audience. In future we will ensure that any coloured text will be clearly legible. Thank you to those who raised this with us!

"There are no facts, only interpretations"  
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosopher (1844 – 1900)*

# Mind your language – writing for a local audience

My ear was once burned off by a message on the answering machine. "Yet another example of ignorance and prejudice about the Highlands" the voice said. And all I had asked for was translation into Gaelic.

What I should have asked for first was guidance on turns of phrase and terminology. I had put words into the mouth of a Clearance township mother: she was joking about boys sitting watching the women doing all the work. This was "another calumny about lazy Highland men". No, it was a universal comment about boys. Not wildly funny but an attempt at humour. (Humour, the interpreter's friend, can often be fickle).

We resolved a couple of other references and parted friends – and the final result has been well-received.<sup>1</sup> But it was a salutary experience. Should we ever try and interpret another community's cultural heritage? Or is 'true' history in the eyes of the beholder?

Similarly, using a language that's not our native tongue is fraught with danger, even with professional help. We're all familiar with the contorted English used by foreign manufacturers; many of us recoil at the English written closer to home! So when I employ Gaelic, for example, alongside or integrated with English (a technique I've worked on a lot with Forest Enterprise), I try to be doubly sure it's the 'right' Gaelic. As with any language, different people say things differently; some are hot on 'new' Gaelic, others worry about the niceties of grammar (I was once advised to use the suspended genitive? It sounds painful but ... no pain, no gain!)

"if your written interpretation is to achieve local acceptance, it's got to sound as if it's written locally"

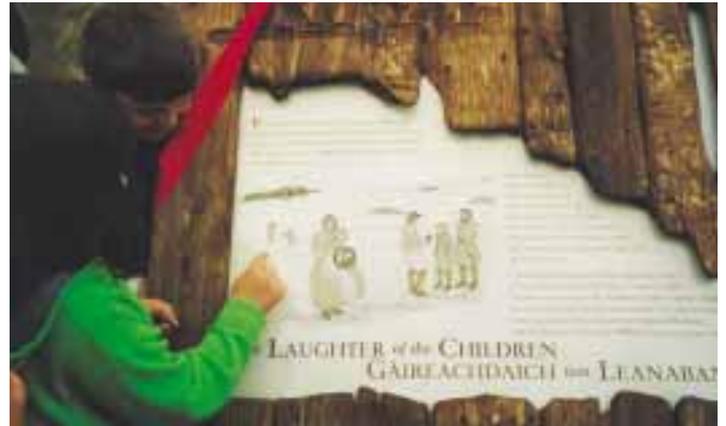
If your written interpretation is to achieve local acceptance, it's got to sound as if it's written locally and not in the 'approved' style of a public agency. In Sunart<sup>2</sup>, I used – within our interpretive framework – passages of descriptive writing by local children. Their perceptions were acute, they wrote evocatively and kept it simple! I then 'filled in the gaps' to complete the picture.

That project highlighted the importance of ensuring that words are spelled (not spelled) according to local custom – and that applies particularly to Gaelic and Scots. Because we don't inflect English with accents, many people are ignorant of their use and cavalier in abandoning them from 'foreign' words. This courts opprobrium if not vitriolic phone messages.

And seek a second opinion. Is the first view representative of local people or, as so often, that of an incomer? Consultation adds time and effort, but whose heritage is it? We lose regional variations at our peril, for language is a formidable evocation of heritage. Words must not take second place to graphics – so build consultation time into the schedule.

English spoken in Scotland varies subtly from that south of the Border, using different but perfectly acceptable words and grammar. And within Scotland, too, regional differences are strong. And that's before we consider Scots and its variants. The Shetland dialect, the Doric of the north east, the 'speak of the Mearns', the 'mither tung' of the south west all have proud traditions – and gloriously expressive words. So visitors won't understand them? So what! Provide glossaries, translations, explanations – the words reflect local heritage.

To give zest to interpretive panels for an Aberdeenshire forest, I used the Doric. However – and this point is general – it's less familiar when



Resolving issues about Gaelic translations on these panels at Rosal Township in Strathnaver was essential to the interpretive process

written, rather than spoken, even to local folk. (We do say 'folk' here although a designer colleague scolded me for using it, but then she was from, well, England). So I wrote my principal interpretation in four-line stanzas. Curiously, verse makes it more acceptable to read (which is another story!)

To help my client, I provided 'translations' in English which were also used although they lack the precision and 'bite' of the Doric (which was checked locally). Here's an example:

## THE BAWKIE BURD<sup>3</sup>

The bawkie burd aye hings about  
Til gloamin faa, fan he gangs oot

Tae fork fur midgecks, mochs, a flee;

His lug dargs mair nor dees his ee.

The hunting bat just hangs about  
Till dusk comes down, when he  
goes out

In search of midges, moths and  
flies;

His ears work harder than his  
eyes.

Another trap to avoid is writing 'from a distance' for words to be read on site. The compiler of a panel on the Commando Memorial at Spean Bridge tumbled neatly when he (probably a he) wrote 'In 1942, the Commando Basic Training Course was established in the Scottish Highlands at Achnacarry'. Perfectly correct; much better would have been 'In 1942, the ... Course was established five miles from here at Achnacarry'. People reading it probably realise that they are in the Scottish Highlands!

As marketing folk will tell you, recommendation is the most effective sales medium. If local people like the interpretation on their doorstep, they'll encourage visitors to use it, build on it and learn more for themselves. If they don't, any amount of good design and well-honed words will be as 'white-settlers', an intrusion rather than an infusion.

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Michael H Glen, Touchstone Heritage Management Consultants,  
Tel 01583 441208

<sup>1</sup> Interpretive panels at Rosal Township in Strathnaver [NC 689417] for Forest Enterprise

<sup>2</sup> Interpretive panels for the Sunart Oakwoods Project, [NM 815616 etc] for Forest Enterprise

<sup>3</sup> One of 12 panels in Kirkhill Forest [NJ 855115] for Forest Enterprise, © Forestry Commission

"Our business is revelation"

Roger Kennedy, Director, National Museum of American History

# Glasgow Open Museum: adventures in a box

Glasgow is proud of the number of visits its museums record each year. At around three million a year, the city takes every opportunity to point out that it has the most visited museums outside London. However, this hides the fact that significant audiences are missing. Research shows that visitors from minority ethnic communities and from the peripheral housing schemes are under-represented. In addition, there are people who face barriers to using museums due to illness, infirmity, special needs or other circumstances.

At the same time much of Glasgow's large and varied collection is locked away in darkened stores. Match this rich reserve collection with a diverse community of non-museum visitors, and you get the Open Museum.

"match a rich reserve collection with a diverse community of non-museum visitors, and you get the Open Museum"

The Open Museum was born in 1990; the year Glasgow was European Cultural Capital. Funded by the old Regional Council's museums, education and social work departments, it developed ways in which community groups and other organisations could work with museum staff to create displays, exhibitions and handling kits of real museum objects for use in local, non-museum venues. Perhaps more importantly, the museum discovered that the partnerships this opened up had a wider impact on the museum service as a whole. The Open Museum has continued to expand and diversify to meet a growing demand, making it one of the most successful of the 1990 projects.

At the heart of the Open Museum are its handling kits. These are specially designed boxes of real museum objects and supporting material that can be borrowed for free from the museum. Some kits are targeted at a school audience, some at a special needs audience, and some at an older, 'remembrance' audience. They contain objects as diverse as fossils, Roman lamps and 1940s silk gloves. The kits are developed in consultation with professionals in the relevant fields as well as through evaluation with users. Once a year, remembrance users are invited to a daylong workshop to discuss the service, share ideas and develop proposals for improvements. The kits are tracked through a booking database that allows the Open Museum to manage over 1,000 loans per year.

As well as handling kits, the Open Museum has developed a wide range of table-top displays and larger, free-standing exhibitions. These have been

created in partnership with local groups, ranging from local history societies to environmental activists. Comprising objects from the museum collection, objects and supporting material collected by volunteers, and audio-visual material, these displays are designed to be easily installed and suitable for a range of different local venues. Exhibits are designed and built in partnership with local people. The Open Museum has experimented with various designers and fabricators, but has found that the skills to create mobile displays incorporating museum objects that meet aesthetic and safety requirements are highly specialised and best delivered by an in-house team.

Working in partnership has allowed the Open Museum to interpret museum objects in ways that traditional museum practice might not:

- ◆ Renaissance figures have been incorporated into a peep-show exploring the experience of an agoraphobic
- ◆ An Ancient Egyptian Shabti figure has stood alongside a 1920s football jersey in a display exploring personal histories
- ◆ A depiction of St William the Hermit by Salvator Rosa has illustrated an exhibition tackling Gay Rights
- ◆ Traditional Hijabs (veils) were collected for the museum by Muslim women for *The Veil in Glasgow* exhibition
- ◆ Artefacts from Britain's oldest peace camp were collected for *The Faslane Peace Caravan* display

Community contacts made through Open Museum projects have also gone on to work with other museum staff on the development of major permanent displays in other museums.

"social inclusion that focuses on individuals and not on grandiose policy"

In the ten years since the Year of Culture, the Open Museum has demonstrated the demand for a museum service that works with local people to find new ways of meeting public interest. It is a cost-effective service, working by engaging audiences at a local level - social inclusion that focuses on individuals and not on grandiose policy. What is more, it has shown that even a large organisation can begin to learn and change when it engages with real people.

Nat Edwards, The Open Museum,  
Tel 0141 287 2699

Making it more relevant - the "Putting the Boot In" display by Trongate Studios explores Doc Martin culture



"In the world's audience hall, the simple blade of grass sits on the same carpet with the sunbeams, and the stars of midnight"

*Sir Rabindranath Tagore. Bengali poet and philosopher (1861 – 1941)*

# research review

## Audience development study

The Heritage Lottery Fund has commissioned Yorkshire-based PLB Consulting Ltd to undertake a major review of audience development on the heritage sector. This follows recent government reports urging museums and galleries to do more to make their collections accessible to a broader cross-section of society.

The research has collated a large body of data on who constitute the main existing audiences for different aspects of our heritage, from countryside access sites and nature reserves to museums and galleries, archives and libraries, historic properties, industrial, maritime and transport sites. The study has shown that there are certain "missing audiences" that are common to most, if not all, of the various sectors that make up our heritage. Included amongst these groups are the very young and the very old, people on low incomes, ethnic minorities, and in most sectors, rural communities. In other words, those commonly considered to be socially excluded.

The study commences with a review of the wider policy context within which audience development work in the heritage sector takes place. Following this, the study report assesses the key barriers to participation in the heritage sector and identifies a wide range of practical solutions that can be used by small and medium-sized heritage organisations seeking to engage with under-represented groups. Many of these examples of good



Scottish Natural Heritage

**Taynish National Nature Reserve appeals to wide range of visitors**

practice are from Scotland, and all have been selected to illustrate the fact that there are many effective, low cost ways of introducing new audiences to different types of heritage site.

The final report was submitted to the HLF in mid-February. Following a period of review by the steering group set up to oversee the project, the findings will be made public in a format yet to be decided.

**For further details contact Dr Richard Smith Bingham, Research and Policy Officer, Heritage Lottery Fund, 7 Holbein Place, London SW1W 8NR**

## Using IT for visitor analysis

The Scottish Museums Council is funding the development of an innovative Visitor Analysis computer system from its Access Fund, a scheme designed to increase audiences to museums throughout Scotland. The simple touch screen technology has been developed by a team from the Hunterian Museum at the University of Glasgow. It is hoped that eventually it will provide a straightforward way of collecting important information about who is (and is not) visiting our museums.

Knowing your audience is a pre-requisite for any audience development work. Before you can embark on expanding your visitor profile, you need to know what it looks like to start with. But collecting this kind of information can be time consuming and expensive. Employing someone to question a random sample of visitors once a year is probably the best and still most widely used method for many museums

and visitor attractions of gauging the visitor profile.

The new system employs computer technology and does away with the need for a clipboard and hours of standing around.

As social inclusion creeps higher up the political agenda, museums and all other visitor attractions and sites, particularly those receiving public funding, have come under increasing pressure to demonstrate that they are 'inclusive'. Exactly what that means is still up for debate in some circles, but a logical place to start is by looking at who makes up the audience. The kind of data such as age, gender, travel time and length of visit is the bread and butter of visitor analysis. But it is the information gleaned from categories like employment status and post code that go to demonstrate how a museum is performing in attracting members of the local community through its doors.

The system comprises a touch screen monitor and computer, which runs a questionnaire. There are a core set of basic questions but then each venue can adapt a further series of questions to

their own circumstances and to reflect the exhibitions they have running at any one time. Completing the questionnaire is a voluntary activity, but there is a facility to include an incentive such as a discount in the shop or a free coffee in the café to encourage participation.

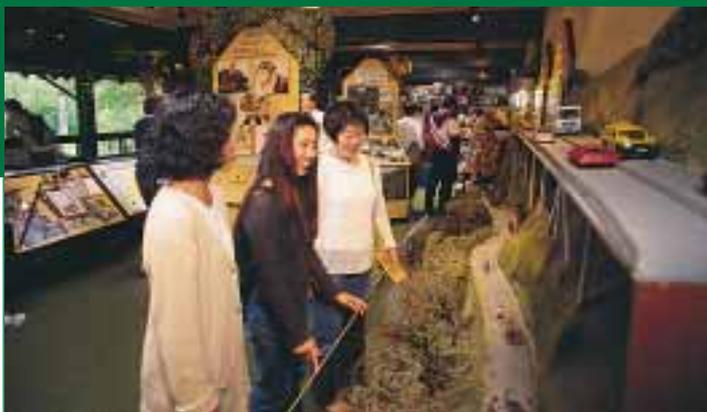
By being able to track the profile of the visitors – on a daily basis if necessary – the effect of new exhibitions and initiatives can clearly be seen. For example, what happens to the visitor profile when an admission charge is introduced? Which exhibition was most popular with under-24s?

The system has recently been trailed in the Hunterian Museum, and the next phase will see it being piloted in other museums throughout Glasgow. The eventual plan is for a range of museums to have a visitor analysis system that can generate comparative data on visitor profiles across Scotland.

**For further information contact Fran Hegyi at the Scottish Museums Council, Tel 0131 229 7465.**

"You'd better do what you feel good about doing. If we try to figure out what our audience wants and then try to deliver it to them, we're lost souls on the ghost ship forever"

Dan Rather, CBS Newsreader



Foreign visitors always hope for interpretation in their own language

## The needs of foreign visitors

Dear Editor

I read your second issue of *Interpret Scotland* about raising the standard of the interpretation offered to our visitors with great interest and applaud its intentions. However as far as I can see there is in it, sadly, only one passing reference to the needs of those foreign visitors whose language is not English. As a foreign language-speaking tourist guide since 1980 I have frequently had to apologise in visitor attractions for the often second class experience offered to those whose knowledge of English doesn't stretch much beyond basic survival transactional language, and who can't interpret all the English-only information presented to them.

Although the situation has improved considerably over recent years, still too often the foreign language speakers are offered a token gesture with a shallow, and occasionally not professionally translated, summary handout that has none of the glossy presentation of the English original.

Even high-tech, high profile attractions like *Our Dynamic Earth* in Edinburgh could offer nothing more than a leaflet to some German speaking visitors we had last summer. They were very disappointed with their visit as a result and felt it necessary to complain at the time. It was therefore with great dismay that I found that your 'checklist to help produce better quality interpretation' in Issue 2 contains no specific reference to foreign languages - even though 'interpreting' does imply 'conveying meaning in other ways'. If we want the benefits of increasing overseas business we have to provide a better service to those who are not fluent in English.

Furthermore, in my other employment as a secondary school language teacher I have spent the last 20 years or so fighting the erroneous notion passed on from parents and society at large that 'everyone understands English so what's the point of learning a foreign language!'. We may wish to be seen as outward-looking and European, but there are still so many ways in which we are insular and do not respond to our neighbours sympathetically. Perhaps if our younger generation were to be exposed to more signage, notices and announcements in foreign languages while they are out and about in Scotland, this would help them realise the position of their country within a multilingual Europe and the wider world.

Yours

**Peter Hutchinson**

8 Greenhill Place  
Edinburgh  
EH10 4BR

# letters

## Highland Folk Museum triple whammy

Dear Editor

Thank you for your reference to the Highland Folk Museum in the last edition of *Interpret Scotland*. We thought that your readers might like to know that the Highland Folk Museum has just scooped an impressive triple whammy of awards. Last month we made Scottish museum history by becoming the first museum to win *both* the Scottish Museum of the Year Award and the Countess of Perth trophy, which is awarded for the most significant improvement to museums and galleries in Scotland. Just a few days after receiving those awards we were delighted to win a prestigious Scottish Thistle Award for Customer Care - Visitor Attraction of the Year.

The Highland Folk Museum has worked tremendously hard over the past eighteen months to improve the visitor experience we provide. It is gratifying for this clutch of awards to recognise both the effort our staff has made and the success of the product itself. But the work doesn't stop here. Readers can be assured of a continuously improving experience at Highland Folk Museum - come and enjoy it !

**Graham Watson**

Cultural and Leisure Services  
Badenoch & Strathsey  
Council Offices  
Ruthven Road  
Kingussie  
PH21 1EJ

### Editor's note:

The use of language is beginning to emerge as a recurrent theme in *Interpret Scotland*. Peter Hutchinson's call for more foreign language interpretation is welcome, but in practice how should it be delivered? Do we want a plethora of panels carrying translated text in several foreign languages? And how should Gaelic - the first language of the landscape - be used in heritage interpretation? We would very much welcome your views and ideas.

In the last edition we published an extract from the text of a panel by Michael Glen of Touchstone Heritage Management Consultants. Unfortunately, a number of errors appeared in our Gaelic translation. We apologise for this mistake, and print below the corrected version.

"If you follow the path **frith-rathad** towards the loch, you will see Dùn Ghallain, an Iron Age chieftain's fort built on an island **eilean** more than 2,000 years ago. It was a place of refuge and almost certainly a signalling point **rubha**. The sheltered bays **scamais** have been used here for thousands of years, and at Risga, there was a large Middle Stone Age settlement **baile**."

The lesson for us, and for readers too, is that all Gaelic and foreign language text should be proofed by someone with the right language skills!

"You may use different sorts of sentences and illustrations before different sorts of audiences, but you don't – if you are wise – talk down to any audience"

Norman Thomas. American Socialist Party leader (1884 – 1968)

# what's <sup>up</sup> elsewhere?

## Weaving the Future with Threads from the Past

### National Association of Interpreters Workshop Tucson, Arizona 7-11 November 2000

When I knew I was going to attend the National Interpretive Workshop 2000 in Tucson, you can imagine what flashed through my mind. I didn't visit Tombstone, and never saw a cowboy, but I did experience an amazing interpretive jamboree.



James Carter

AUS Park Ranger – uses lego to interpret the Grand Canyon

Chances are it will also be many others' and you won't get in! So you have to be even quicker to get to the next – it's quite normal for folk to leave half way through if the topic doesn't match expectations. You can also attend 2 pre-workshop days, as I did, to get in some training. I went to 'Making your Interpretation Plans Reality' by the US Parks Service. It was very useful, but I would have preferred a less didactic approach. Scottish Interpreter Hugh Muschamp, who joined me for a couple of days' site visiting before NIW, chose instead to visit the truly excellent Sonora Desert Museum, and unknowingly meet his destiny!

NIW has plenty of other attractions like the trade exhibition and an auction to raise money for interpretation students. I was intrigued to see the ash bowl I turned from Battleby wood go for \$150 to a home in Las Vegas.

The people, of course, are always the highlight at such events and the last evening banquet and dance cemented long-term friendships and relationships. In Hugh's case, yes, he is to marry Claire Taylor of NAI's Region 4. Congratulations to both! Spurred on by both Hugh and the Region 4 folk who adopted us, and by an inspirational keynote from Steve Van Matre, I began my own presentation as 'Red Gordon, the Mad Warrior Chieftain' cajoling his troops before the mythical battle against Viking invaders that may have given Battleby its name. This was done to match the workshop theme. I removed the wig and blanket before I explained about Interpret Scotland (we now have several US subscribers). Hugh also told them about the Scottish Interpretation Network.

If you can find the money, the NIW is great value and great fun – next year it's in Des Moines, Iowa. The post conference source book you get free is packed full of references and up to date interpretation goodies. NAI would like more of us to attend these events, and I think we should hold a joint event in Scotland – who knows, we might cement the 'special relationship' even further!

David Downie, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel 01738 444177

## Interpret Europe launched

The 'Interpret Europe' European Network for Heritage Interpretation has been launched at a workshop in Germany. The key aim of the network is to 'Work towards the establishment of a European Association of interpretive professionals and supporting organisations'.

The network is run by a part-time secretariat at the University of Göttingen and the Institut für Physische Geographie in Freiburg. English is the main language of communication.

The following project ideas are currently under discussion by the network:

- ◆ The development of vocational training in interpretation
- ◆ The training of interpretation trainers
- ◆ The development of academic curricula in interpretation training
- ◆ The establishment of a European award scheme for good practice in interpretation
- ◆ The development of an expert system as a planning tool for interpreters
- ◆ The promotion of 'model interpretive facilities'
- ◆ A possible regional award

Network membership is free and is open to anyone interested in heritage interpretation.

A Steering Group is currently being set up – if you would like to get involved, or simply to register as a member, please contact the secretariat. The next Steering Group meeting will take place in Scotland in April 2001.

Interpret Europe Secretariat:

[info@interpret-europe.net](mailto:info@interpret-europe.net),

web site [www.interpret-europe.net](http://www.interpret-europe.net).

Postal address: c/o Department of Geography,  
University of Göttingen, Goldschmidtstr.

5,D-37077 Göttingen, Germany.

Tel + 49 0551 39 80 22

## What Have We Started?

In the last edition *Interpret Scotland* carried the results of the Highland Interpretive Inventory, and publicised the 'Practical Guide' that had subsequently been developed. The response to this article has been very encouraging. Rona Gibb of the Highland Interpretive Strategy Project says "I was amazed by the reaction - within 3 weeks I had sent out 14 manuals and had 24 phone calls about the article from across the UK. The National Trust for Scotland has recently used the Guide to survey all their sites. This is a good example of sharing good practice and an indication of the invaluable role that *Interpret Scotland* can play."

# news and events

## The CANMORE database

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) is a pioneer in the heritage field in the use of on-line searchable databases, with the entire database of the National Monuments Record of Scotland (NMRS) now available through the RCAHMS Website <http://www.rcahms.gov.uk>

This database, called CANMORE (Computer Application for National Monuments Record Enquiries), provides detailed information on buildings, archaeological sites and monuments, and the maritime heritage in Scotland. RCAHMS surveys and records the built environment in Scotland and the results of its work are made available to the public through CANMORE. There are c.170,000 records in CANMORE and this number increases on a daily basis as further research, surveys and computerisation of paper indices is undertaken. Since the launch of CANMORE on the web in 1998, over 100,000 enquiries have been made from as far afield as Alaska, the Falkland Islands, North America, Australia and New Zealand.

CANMORE also gives access to the catalogue of archives held in the NMRS - a vast collection of photographs (including vertical aerial views), original drawings, excavation reports, reference books, maps and other material on the architecture, archaeology and heritage of Scotland.

Public accessibility is a priority for RCAHMS and further developments and enhancements to CANMORE are planned.



An extract from the RCAHMS photographic database of Phoebe Traquair murals at Mansfield Place Church, Edinburgh

## Reviews

### Tour Guiding: developing effective interpretation techniques

Roy Ballantyne *et al* (2000), Queensland University of Technology, Australia  
82pp workbook & 76 minute video, £55.00

This excellent new instructional video and workbook has been produced to support the Australian National Nature and Ecotour Guide Certification Programme. It is a practical learning tool that will be of use to both new and experienced interpretive guides. Although the video case studies are focused on Aussie natural heritage sites, the core principles will apply to interpretive guiding anywhere. Available from: Karen Hughes, School of Professional Studies, QUT, Victoria Park Rd, Kelvin Grove, QLD 4059 Australia, email: [ka.hughes@qut.edu.au](mailto:ka.hughes@qut.edu.au)

## Broadening the Brief

Under the umbrella of SNH's *Sharing Good Practice* programme, the Black Environment Network (BEN) recently ran a very successful one day workshop on Ethnic Environmental Participation. BEN is a UK wide organisation and they now have offices in Edinburgh.

They have two main aims:

- To increase the level of awareness in issues relating to working with ethnic communities
- To make available to ethnic groups a range of resources and information that they usually do not have access to.

Increased awareness amongst interpreters could help BEN in its aims as well as broadening the way we all think about the information we provide. Contact BEN, c/o FCSH, Wellgate House, 200 Cowgate, Edinburgh EH1 1NQ, Tel 0131 622 7171

## Events

### Interpretation

*Losehill Hall / TellTale Interpretation*  
30 April - 4 May 2001; £519  
Losehill Hall, Derbyshire  
Contact: Losehill Hall, Tel 01433 620373

### The Interpretive Planning Process

*Interpret Scotland / John Veverka*  
15 - 16 May 2001; £80  
Battleby, Perth  
(Participants attending this workshop and "How to Get Your Interpretation Right First Time" the following day will be charged £110)  
Contact: Eilidh Strang, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel 01738 444177

### How To Get Your Interpretation Right First Time

*Interpret Scotland / John Veverka*  
17 May 2001; £50  
Battleby, Perth  
Contact: Eilidh Strang, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel 01738 444177

### From AV 2 VR, via AA, WAP & CCTV

(Everything you want to know about electronic technology in interpretation)  
*Interpret Scotland*  
11 September 2001; £50  
Battleby, Perth  
Contact: Eilidh Strang, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel 01738 444177

### Hewn from the Living Rock

(storytelling from Stones)  
*SNH in association with NTS, Historic Scotland and the Scottish Tour Guides Association*  
11 October 2001; £50  
Contact: Eilidh Strang, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel 01738 444177

### Working with Words

*Interpret Scotland / James Carter*  
13 November 2001; £50  
Battleby, Perth  
Contact: Eilidh Strang, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel 01738 444177

### Organising programmes of guided walks and events

*Losehill Hall / Yvonne Hosker Training and Advice Service*  
26 - 27 November 2001; £230  
Losehill Hall, Derbyshire  
Contact: Losehill Hall, Tel 01433 620373



# a dynamic attraction

Our Dynamic Earth

When Scottish & Newcastle gifted 10 acres of derelict industrial land at Holyrood to the Dynamic Earth Charitable Trust, it was with two objectives in mind. Firstly, that a visitor attraction would be built for the educational benefit of people from Edinburgh, Scotland and beyond; and secondly that this would stimulate urban renewal in the vicinity.

The educational theme of Our Dynamic Earth developed from Edinburgh's landscape that, dominated by its 7 hills, is a product of 'fire and ice'. 250 years ago, in the Edinburgh Enlightenment, pioneering academics stimulated interest in understanding how the Earth works. One of the period's leading figures, James Hutton, developed the "Theory of the Earth", a comprehensive view of our planet and its processes that revealed the enormity of geological time. Hutton's ground-breaking ideas inspired the development of our attraction, with the educational goal of telling the Earth's exciting story. Inspired by Hutton's concept of 'education through entertainment', and to attract the visitor number required to make our business self-sustaining, we needed to make our story fun.

"inspired by Hutton's concept of 'education through entertainment', and to attract the visitor number required to make our business self-sustaining, we needed to make our story fun."

Visitor analysis indicated that foreign tourists would only make up 20% of our visitor mix, and that the majority would be people living within a two-hour drive time. As a consequence families, groups and schools were the focus of our

interpretive and marketing strategies. This approach facilitated a clear understanding of the ways in which our story should be interpreted to attract these audiences. It also helped us develop a cohesive and highly successful marketing strategy that made the public aware of what we were and differentiated us from other attractions.

So how did we go about creating an attraction that makes learning about how our planet works fun, and that also delivers big messages to a wide audience of families, groups and schools?

"how did we create an attraction that delivers big messages to a wide audience?"

Our challenge was to convey the drama of the Earth's story - millions of years in the making - to audiences with widely differing expectations, while dealing with logistical problems of high visitor throughput and creating an experience that would encourage repeat visits. Analysing the effectiveness of attractions from around the world, we concluded that the most effective approach would be to communicate our story as a multi-sensory, immersive experience, treating each gallery as a chapter in the Earth's story.

The presentation of the story combined scientific and interpretive design talents, ensuring scientific accuracy and integrity while maximising the opportunities to inform and entertain, adapting some Disney techniques within space and budgetary constraints. We take our visitors back to the beginning of time; on a trip through the Universe; to an earthquake and erupting volcano; across glaciers; through major evolutionary events; into the oceans; and

overland from polar areas to the tropical forest. The story begins and ends with the human perspective. In the introductory gallery visitors take the pulse of the planet while the concluding 'Showdome' highlights destructive but rejuvenating planetary processes and considers humanity's future.

In presenting a holistic view of our planet, we illustrate processes rather than products, an approach that complements museum collections. The galleries bring many subjects to life, introducing astronomy, geology, geomorphology, evolutionary biology, oceanography and marine and terrestrial ecology to our audience. As a result, Our Dynamic Earth is unique in terms of its breadth, communicating the complex relationship between these subjects and blending education with entertainment.

A variety of presentational styles are used; large and small-scale audio-visual shows with setwork, lighting and smells contribute to the re-creation of realistic atmospheres, while exhibits such as the polar ice and the tropical rainforest rainstorm add to the "total experience". This approach encourages a shared experience for our visitors. Computer interactives are effective in providing extra layers of information, but their use is restricted as they detract from the group experience.

In this time of life-long learning, Our Dynamic Earth opens windows on science to people of all ages and interests. Over 500,000 people visited during our first year, indicating that our exciting approach is effective, making the Earth's story engaging, accessible, fun and relevant. The popularity of season tickets shows that one visit is just not enough!

Dee Davidson, Education Manager, Dynamic Earth 0131 550 7800