



Mind Your Language? policies on multi-lingual interpretation



Written Language put your soul into words



Creative Corner an inspired idea?



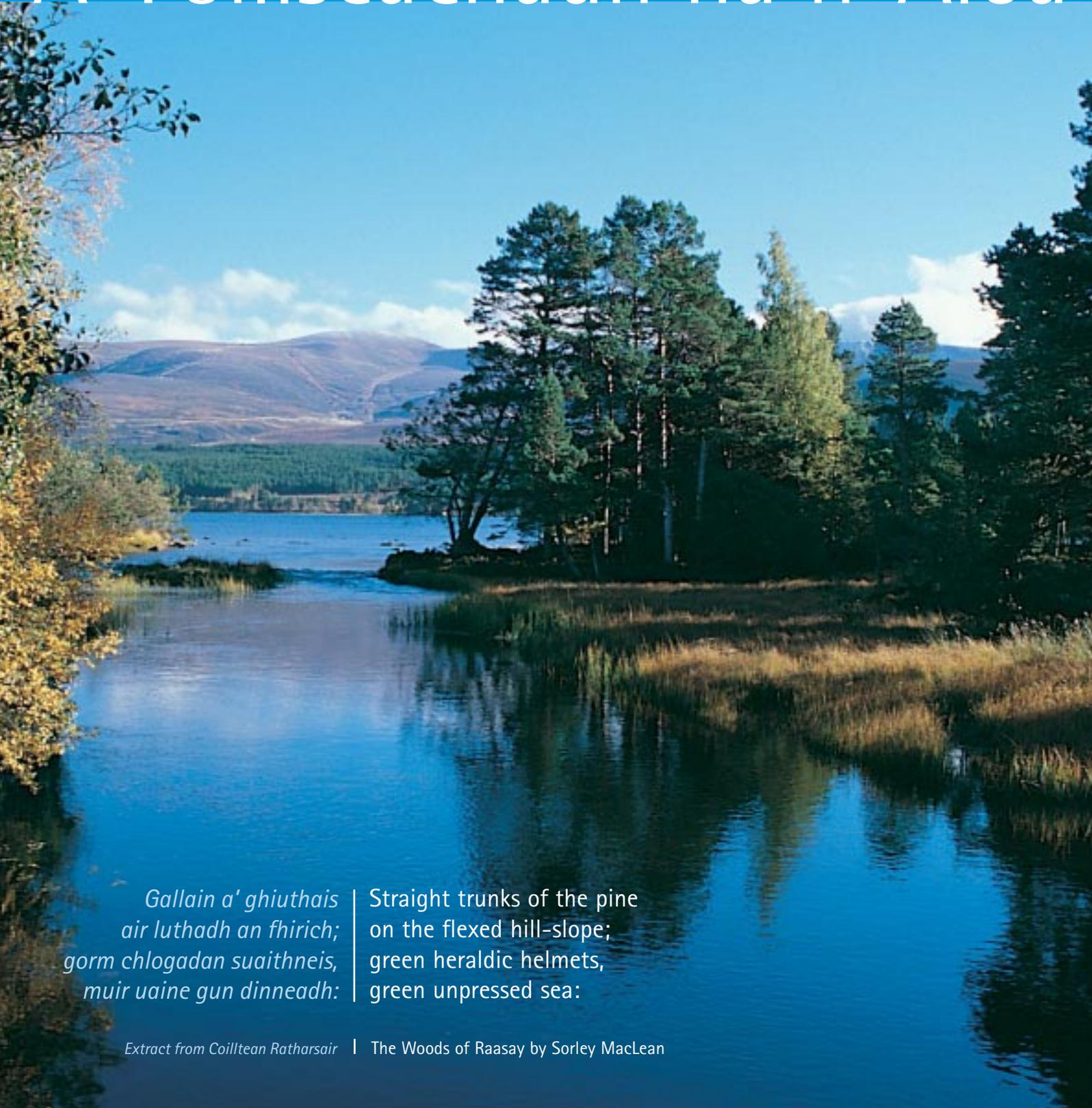
Gaelic Interpretation at Arnol township

the journal for Scotland's Interpreters

# Interpret Scotland

issue 5 | spring 2002

## A' Foillseachadh na h-Alba



*Gallain a' ghiuthais  
air luthadh an fhirich;  
gorm chlogadan suaithneis,  
muir uaine gun dinneadh:*

Straight trunks of the pine  
on the flexed hill-slope;  
green heraldic helmets,  
green unpressed sea:

# Interpret Scotland

www.interpretscotland.org.uk

Produced by Interpret Scotland

Issue 5: Language and Interpretation; Spring 2002

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

## The Interpret Scotland steering group:

Emma Carver, Historic Scotland 0131 668 8600 emma.carver@scotland.gsi.gov.uk  
David Downie, Scottish Natural Heritage 01738 458553 david.downie@snh.gov.uk  
Ian Darwin Edwards, Royal Botanic Garden 0131 552 7171 i.edwards@rbgs.org.uk  
Jill Duncan, Scottish Wildlife Trust, 01786 455300 jduncan@swt.org.uk  
Julie Forrest, Scottish Natural Heritage 01738 458553 julie.forrest@snh.gov.uk  
Annette MacTavish, National Museum of Scotland 0131 247 4046 a.mactavish@nms.ac.uk  
David Lynn, Council for Scottish Archaeology 0131 247 4119 d.lynn@nms.ac.uk  
Jane Robinson, Scottish Museums Council 0131 229 7465 janerob@scottishmuseums.org.uk  
Bob Jones, Forest Enterprise 0131 334 0303 bob.jones@forestry.gsi.gov.uk  
Colin MacConnachie, The National Trust for Scotland 0131 243 9359 cmacconnachie@nts.org.uk  
Indira Mann, The National Trust for Scotland 0131 243 9359 imann@nts.org.uk  
Rosalind Newlands, Scottish Tourist Guides Association 01786 447784  
rosnewlands@osa.sol.co.uk

Chris Tabraham, Historic Scotland 0131 668 8600 chris.tabraham@scotland.gsi.gov.uk  
Other organisations with a national remit relevant to interpretation are welcome to join

Editor: David Masters, 25 Albion Road, Edinburgh EH7 5QJ, 0131 467 0093,  
dd.masters@virgin.net

Editorial team: Lorna Brown, Scottish Natural Heritage; Emma Carver, Historic Scotland; Caroline Tempest, The National Trust for Scotland

Design and layout: Anne Baxter, Design and Interpretative Services, Forest Enterprise  
Printed by Lithoprint on environmentally friendly paper

The views in this journal represent those of authors and contributors, not necessarily those of the sponsoring organisations. Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of its contents, we accept no responsibility for inaccurate or misleading information.

## Contents

Editorial	2
Mind Your Language?	3
The state of Gaelic and foreign language interpretation in Scotland	
Language by Design	4
How to deliver bi- and multi-lingual interpretation	
Easy There Dad!	5
Talking to children in their own language	
A Style Guide	6
The written language of interpretation	
Its As Easy As	7
Good practice writing guidelines	
Research Review	8
What's new in the world of interpretation research	
Creative Corner	8
Ideas to get your creative juices flowing	
Letters	9
Personal opinion given free reign	
What's up Elsewhere	10
New networks in England and Wales	
News and Events	11
Who, what, when, where, why...	
Life in the Black House	12
Gaelic interpretation at Arnol Blackhouse, Lewis	

## Next edition

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

Copy deadline is 7 July 2002.

Forthcoming editions will explore 'Meaning and Motivation: Linking Psychology and Interpretation'; and 'Getting the Most From Consultants and Designers'. We would welcome offers of articles on either of these subjects.

language *noun*

The method of human communication. From the Latin 'lingua' meaning tongue.

## The language of interpretation

It's not what you do it's the way that you do it, and the same can be said for the way we communicate. It's not so much what you say but the way that you say it.

The language we use when expressing ourselves conveys much more to the reader than just the subject we are speaking or writing about; it reveals who we are, our understanding of the world, and our attitude to those we are 'talking' to.

In face-to-face situations, an interpreter can rely on a friendly smile or a wave of the arm to help convey a point. However, when using the written word the language you use will have to stand alone and is open to (mis)interpretation. Getting the style, content and clarity of our interpretive language right cannot be over estimated.

When it comes to communicating in another language, particularly if you as interpreter are having to get a translation done by someone else, the potential for things to go wrong seem greater than ever; and creating a multi-lingual yet accessible exhibition is a considerable challenge.

Even with our oldest language Gaelic, if you get the subtle variations from one area to another wrong, it can undo your best intentions and affect how your message is received. This edition contains a number of articles which give us all a useful insight into how we can integrate Gaelic effectively into our interpretation.

First person, third person, narrative, didactic - this edition also considers the different forms of written language and suggests some good practice guidelines which will help us all to become more creative and effective in our communication.

If I can steal a line from Karen McDonald's article I hope this journal encourages you to get 'your creative juices flowing'!

Finally thanks to all those who responded to the feedback questionnaire in the last edition - the results are on page 8 and they make heartening reading.

Julie Forrest  
Advisory Manager, Interpretation, SNH

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 458557 email: eilidh.strang@snh.gov.uk. You could also visit the Interpret Scotland website: [www.interpretscotland.org.uk](http://www.interpretscotland.org.uk)

"Language is the blood of the soul into which thoughts run and out of which they grow"  
Oliver Wendell Holmes, *American jurist, 1841 - 1935*

# Mind your language?

2002, a New Year, a new European currency and another step on the rather shaky ladder towards European harmony. But how well do we in Scotland welcome our continental cousins? Is the foreign language interpretation we provide at our castles and palaces, countryside centres and woodland walks up to scratch? And what quality of interpretation do we provide for our native Gaelic speakers – do we have a duty to preserve our own cultural diversity?

In 2000, Scotland welcomed 1.7 million overseas tourists, boosting our economy by £789m<sup>1</sup>. After the Americans, the French and Germans are our most loyal and numerous visitors, with the Dutch, Italians, Belgians and Spanish not far behind. A whopping 83% of these foreign tourists' visit our castles, monuments, churches, museums, art galleries and heritage sites. Hiking and rambling is also high on their hit list.

How are we catering for their interpretive needs? A quick survey of Interpret Scotland member organisations suggests that more research into visitors, combined with clear policies on foreign language and Gaelic interpretation, would be of real benefit.

## The rather stark facts are:

- ◆ Of all agencies with a national interpretation remit, only SNH has a formal policy on Gaelic interpretation, and none have a formal policy on foreign language interpretation.
- ◆ Most agencies provide some Gaelic and foreign language interpretation, but it is often ad hoc and done on a site by site basis.

The National Trust for Scotland, for example, attempts to provide translated interpretation at properties where there is a perceived need for it. This relies on the enthusiasm of property managers to monitor their visitors, and is entirely dependent on the budget available. This also seems to be the case at the Forestry Commission, where translation is usually confined to a welcome and an introductory sentence or two. The Scottish Museums Council has no policy or guidelines from which we can draw. Other agencies nod their collective heads towards a similar, rather haphazard approach. In Wales the situation is much more clear-cut, with full Welsh language translations required by law. Would this system be a benefit for Scotland?

Naturally, there would be implications of an inflexible translation policy – it's easy to imagine the absurdity of bureaucratic regulations insisting that every interpretive panel should be translated into 5 languages. Design quality would be greatly compromised, thus failing every visitor including those who speak English. Indeed, interpretation covers such a vast array of media and materials that this would be nigh impossible.

## In developing such guidelines some key questions should be addressed:

- ◆ Do our foreign visitors really want interpretation in their own language, or would they prefer to practice their English language skills?
- ◆ What proportion of foreign language visitors to a site would be needed to justify interpretation in their mother-tongue? 5%?10%? 20%?

## Ariundle

NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

The celebrated oakwood of Ariundle actually carries the name of the ground beyond the trees. When the local Gaelic speaking people grazed cattle on the hill land in Strontian Glen, they called this place *Airigh Fhionndail* – 'the shieling of the white meadow'. The cattle herders have long gone, as have the woodsmen and charcoal burners who used the trees to fuel the white heat of industry in the Bonawe furnace. Now Scottish Natural Heritage cares for this vintage reserve, as modern guardian of an ancient place, where both wildlife and people have deep roots.



TÈARMANN NÀDAIR  
NÀISEANTA

## Àirigh Fhionndail

Ged as e Àirigh Fhionndail – 'an àirigh san lagan gheal' – a theirear ris a' choille dharach ainmeil seo an diugh, 's ann don talamh os cionn nan craobhan a bhuineadh an t-ainm o thùs. Ach is fhada bho dh'fhalbh buachaillean na h-àirigh. Dh'fhalbh na fir a bha uaireigin ag obair sa choille cuideachd, agus luchd-ìosgaidh a' ghuaill-fhiodha, a rinn feum de na craobhan gus teas a chumail ri fùirneis Bhun Abha. Tha an tèarmann a-nis fo chùram Dualchais Nàdair na h-Alba, agus is iad an diugh luchd-dìona an àite àrsaidh seo.

Does this bi-lingual leaflet meet the needs of local Gaelic speakers, and add to the sense of place for everyone?

- ◆ What quality standards should we aspire to in providing foreign language interpretation? Can we identify acceptable benchmarks for appropriate levels of provision?
- ◆ How can we assure good quality translation, because according to Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo, "an idea does not pass from one language to another without change"<sup>2</sup>?
- ◆ Is Gaelic interpretation an essential service to the Gaelic speaking community, and how much does the use of Gaelic add to a sense of place for all visitors?

Most agencies have a political onus to provide Gaelic interpretation in the Highlands, but as yet, few have a clear policy about this, and whether it should be word-for-word, a succinct summary or whatever. This is at best unhelpful and at worst embarrassing and offensive.

The world is changing around us: the global economy is creating increased affluence and more disposable income. Leisure and business travel is expected to double over the next 10 years, with cheaper flights and a higher awareness of leisure opportunities due to the internet. At the same time, we are becoming more concerned to celebrate and preserve our culture in the face of huge corporate pressure for everything to look the same.

Interpretation is a fantastic opportunity to exploit our potential, making foreign visitors feel welcome and nurturing our Gaelic heritage. 2002, the year of the Euro, offers the best opportunity to reflect on properly this.

Caroline Tempest, The National Trust for Scotland, 0131 243 9356

Editor's note: As ever we would welcome your views on this key national issue. Please write to the editor or contact the agency representatives listed on page 2.

<sup>1</sup> All statistics provided by *Tourism in Scotland 2000* VisitScotland 2001

<sup>2</sup> Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Peoples* 1913

"My culture and my language have the right to exist, and no one has the authority to dismiss that"

James Kelman 1946–, Speech accepting the Booker Prize, 11 Oct 1994

# Language by DESIGN

*Translating written or spoken interpretation into one or more additional languages has important implications for the choice of media and design. Here Michael Glen and Bob Jones outline some key issues.*

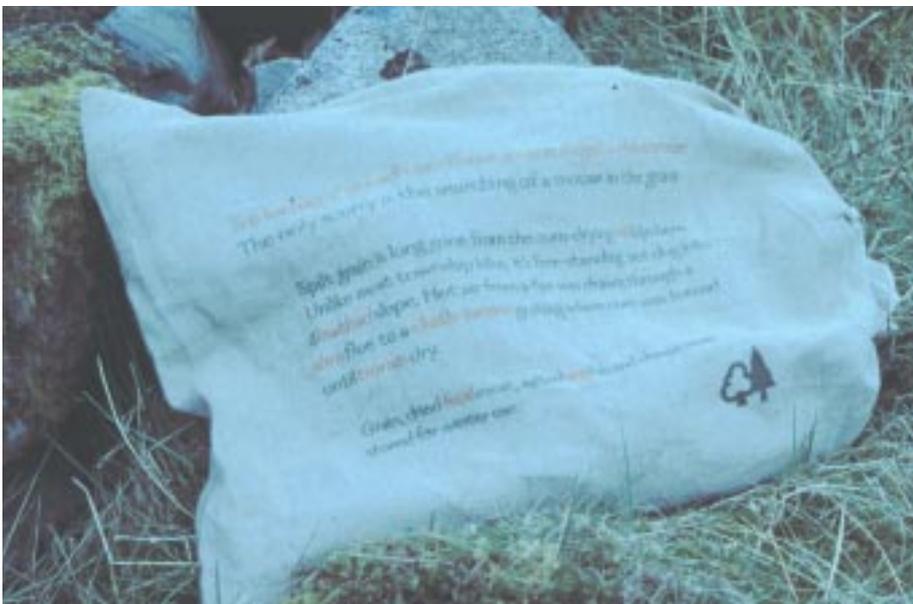
An understanding of language – and of its cultural determinants – is crucial to communication. The sender must know the language of the receiver, and must ensure that the message is understood in the culture of the receiver. This means that interpreters, and designers, must help audiences to understand 'the message' in their own terms, and that usually means their own – or familiar – languages.

Good interpretation uses stories, wit, humour, explanation and brevity. But how easy is it to do this in two or more languages? Humour, for example, is a fickle traveller. And what are the 'most appropriate' media?

It's relatively easy to produce bi-, tri- or multi-lingual or leaflets – we use them when we buy consumer products. They're practical rather than appealing, often cumbersome and confusing. An interpretive leaflet in two or more languages can become irritating if not carefully designed; many in Wales are 'back to front' and you always pick them up the 'wrong' way!

An interpretive panel with two parallel texts is potentially twice the size of its mono-lingual counterpart. It can be of value only if the written content is very short – or both sides of a vertical structure are used. But which language goes where? And reading vertical panels is uncomfortable.

As a rule, if you use two languages, halve the message length. In Wales, this would increase the appeal of leaflets and panels; and providing interplay between parallel texts can add to the interpretation. It is, of course, possible, but not always practicable, to provide two versions of a panel or leaflet. And what happens when interpretation is needed in more than two languages? Here the brief must direct – and pay for – the designer to use appropriate techniques and not treat the whole in a 'one-language' way.



Bob Jones

*This inter-weaving of Gaelic and English is a good design solution to bi-lingual interpretation.*

Compromise has a valuable role too. In *Interpret Scotland* no. 3 we described a way of combining Gaelic with predominantly English text through parallel headings and occasional words in the narrative. This also encourages non-Gaelic speakers to learn a few words and pursue further knowledge of the language. Although this technique reinforces Gaelic's cultural importance, it can't be applied to foreign languages without creative design. What can be done here is to acknowledge non-English speakers by translating words of welcome – or a précis – into several languages.

There are also techniques such as 'ghosting' words from different languages on top of each other, and ways of graphically presenting the inflections and mood of language. Where the language – like Gaelic – uses pronunciation unfamiliar to readers, phonetic translations can help too.

**"There are also techniques such as ghosting words from different languages on top of each other"**

Audio guides and 'listening points' let the receiver choose the language without losing impact, and some visitors will switch between their own and the local language or dialect. Music and song are universal and can marry linguistic versions of a commentary or explanation. In a similar way, video can offer a choice of language through individual receiving equipment and scrolled text or, if very brief, in two or more languages.

But 'physical' means of presenting options go beyond recording or new digital media. There are many 'mechanical' devices, and the world of children's toys is awash with clever ways of packing a lot into a small space, then revealing it gradually – like origami. Don't forget, too, that 'one picture is worth a thousand words'. Historical illustrations, reconstruction diagrams, costumed figures can reach out more powerfully than a cacophony of words.

But perhaps the saviour of the linguistic mêlée is the touchscreen, where the receiver can choose his or her preferred language. Computers are the most flexible of all media in this context, but they need to be programmed by those who understand the subtleties of language. And you have equipment costs and maintenance to consider.

When you plan your interpretation, and the need for more than one language, weigh up the implications, potential routes and advantages. Make sure, too, that whoever translates your English is not only linguistically accurate – and colloquial – but also able to interpret the cultural references for readers and listeners.

**Michael H. Glen**, Touchstone Heritage Management Consultants, 01583 441208, [tigstane@compuserve.com](mailto:tigstane@compuserve.com) and **Bob Jones**, Design & Interpretative Services, Forest Enterprise, 0131-334 0303, [bob.jones@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:bob.jones@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

"The finest language is mostly made up of simple, unimposing words".

George Elliot, writer 1819 - 1880

# easy there dad!

## talking to children in their language

Children are a great audience for interpreters. They live in a world rich with play and exploration, their thirst for understanding fertile ground for creative and engaging interpretation.

Children, and their mums and dads, are a large portion of the audience at many interpretive facilities. They require special attention, and in particular to be talked to in their own language.

In his seminal work *Interpreting Our Heritage*,<sup>1</sup> Freeman Tilden outlined the principles of interpretation, which include

**"Interpretation addressed to children should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach."**

Interpretation for children is different because their abilities and experiences differ from adults. However, it should still follow the basic principles of interpretation, such as provoking interest, relating to the audiences' experiences, and revealing new information.

In *Interpretation for the 21st Century*,<sup>2</sup> Larry Beck and Ted Cable cite work that explores how to connect interpretation with children.

**"Getting connected requires an understanding of the developmental stages of childhood, and in what ways these offer interpretive opportunities or limitations."**

A program about birds for four-year olds will be very different from one of the same programme for ten year olds. Vocabulary and reading levels, fine motor skills and more, vary greatly among different ages. In other words, know your audience, and plan age-appropriate activities.

Children learn by hearing, seeing, speaking and playing. The more use you can make of their senses and different ways they absorb information and experiences, the more successfully you will relate to them.

When designing exhibits or publications for children, consider that studies show until about the age of seven, they need instructions to be given in visual format, not written. When instructing a group of children how to touch a live animal, demonstrate how you want them to touch the animal, rather than giving complex verbal commands.

Below are some other key points to remember:

- ◆ Think like a kid, and talk to them on their level - using words and examples they can understand. For some this comes naturally but others will have to practice by gaining more experience in communicating with children.
- ◆ Choose themes that children identify with and experience in a tangible way. It makes more sense to teach Scottish five-year olds about local wildflowers than tropical rainforest destruction.
- ◆ Make learning fun through the use of questioning, props, puppets, storytelling, games, imagery, and physical activities.
- ◆ Avoid saturating their brains with facts. Don't worry about the name of each species of bird visiting a feeder. Instead, discuss the colours



This cartoon style interpretation appeals to all ages, especially children.

James Carter

of the different birds, how the birds are behaving, how one bird looks like another.

- ◆ Don't be abstract - find tangible ways to communicate concepts and instructions. When I talk with children about the components of habitat, we talk about space in which to live. If indoors I ask them to look around the room we are sitting in, and I ask them, would an elephant be happy living in this room, even if it had enough food and water? The children can immediately see that an average room does not have enough space for an elephant!
- ◆ And lastly, be sincere. Children know when you are not enthusiastic about the subject being presented, or about working with them!

Beck and Cable paint a nice picture of an interpreter who has not forgotten what it is like to be a child. According to them, an effective children's interpreter should:

- ◆ "Shed inhibitions!
- ◆ Be patient!
- ◆ Be creative!
- ◆ Tell a story!
- ◆ Create a sense of adventure!
- ◆ Be animated and positive!
- ◆ Show interest in what the kids are interested in!
- ◆ Maintain some semblance of order, without stifling the kids!
- ◆ Love kids!
- ◆ Smile!!!"

Claire Taylor, Environmental Educator and Interpretation Consultant,  
[clairetaylor@muschamp.softnet.co.uk](mailto:clairetaylor@muschamp.softnet.co.uk)

Thanks also to **Bonnie Maggio** of Scottish Natural Heritage for information used in this article.

This chart shows some generalisations about learning abilities

CHILD'S AGE	NUMBER OF WORDS OF USEFUL SPEECH	LANGUAGE USAGE
2	200-300	Names objects, obeys commands
3	1000	Incessantly asks questions
4	1500	Begins to read and write, counts to 20
5	2000	Fluent speaker, reads and writes

<sup>1</sup> Tilden, F. 1957. *Interpreting our Heritage*.

<sup>2</sup> Beck, L. and Cable, T. 1998. *Interpretation for the 21st Century*. Sagamore Publishing. Page 77.

# written

According to Charlemagne, "To have another language is to possess a second soul". Here Susan Cross and James Carter suggest how interpreters can explore their soul through different styles of writing. They also suggest some good practice writing guidelines that will help you put your soul into words.

## A style guide

*'You've either got or you haven't got style.*

*If you've got it, it stands out a mile'*

(written by Jimmy Van Heusen, sung by Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby and Dean Martin)

If you're feeling that your writing is a bit down at heel, faded or jaded or, worse, predictable, this article is for you. Here are some writing tips to brighten up your interpretation this summer.

### 1 Didactic

The classic style and where most of us begin (and some of us end) with our interpretive writing. This is the voice of authority and learning, of textbooks and teachers. It sets out to draw people into a new world of intellectual understanding and tries to equip them with the concepts and vocabulary that they will need. The didactic style aims to teach, but if it's to teach well it needs to take a considered approach to how information is presented, and what the reader's reaction might be. Although familiar, the didactic style is harder to carry off than it looks.

Style tips

- ◆ Don't slip into the language of scholarship.
- ◆ Remember that 'a museum is not a book': the same goes for visitor centres, outdoor panels, leaflets and plaques.

### 2 Narrative

This style draws on the age-old tradition of storytelling, whether it's about people or things. It requires thought and care about the order in which you present information, and it's success relies on the storyteller's tools of engaging your audience: asking questions, using suspense, humour, the unexpected, and a conscious use of rhythm in both language and the play of emotions and reactions in your readers. When successful this can be entertaining, informative, and involving.

Style tips

- ◆ Keep it brief.
- ◆ Choose stories that really interest and move you, rather than ones you think you ought to tell.

### 3 First and third person

If you chose a narrative style you can use 'the third person' or 'the first person' as if on a television screen, detached from the action. This may be reassuring because we're familiar with the perspective, but it's potentially devoid of emotion.

Writing in the first person, using 'I' or 'we', can be fun and effective. For example 'I never thought I'd lose my kingdom to some upstart Norman'. Many readers like this: first person text seems alive and involving. It can disturb people who expect a more traditional approach, but it certainly gets your words noticed.

Style tips

- ◆ If you're writing in the first person, spend time developing your character to make their words convincing.
- ◆ Sometimes you will have to use more words than are necessary for the story to create atmosphere and colour.
- ◆ Avoid using the first person for well-known characters (unless you have authentic quotes).

### 4 Conversational

If you want to mix with the crowd, you need to use their language. People want to enjoy themselves, don't they? A conversational writing style goes all out to help them. It asks them questions and actively encourages them to get involved. Smell the flowers. Climb the hill. Wonder at Nature. Explore. Discover. This is Your Place and you are Welcome. This style is based on enthusiasm.



## Interpreters can learn from the skills of tabloid writers

This piece of interpretation was written and designed in the style of a tabloid. The beginning of the main text reads as follows:

### PEACE AT LAST?

- ◆ Raging rock hounds' stooshie stilled
- ◆ Dynamic duo prove amateurs right

The long running stooshie between 'professional' and 'amateur' geologists over what happened at dramatic Knockan Crag has been settled – and the amateurs have won!

For years, Sir Roderick Murchison and Archibald Geikie, officers of the government's Geological Survey, have battled with James Nicol and Charles Lapworth. The Survey's supremos thought the rocks here were in a normal sequence, with the youngest at the top of the crag. But Nicol and Lapworth argued the top layer was older than the rocks underneath.

# language

Conversational writing is not universally popular: people often accuse it of dumbing down or reading like a tabloid newspaper. This style can indeed draw on the skills of a tabloid journalist - perhaps to great effect. But watch out. Though this style has been growing in popularity for years, it's easy for it to sound hollow and superficial.

## Style tips

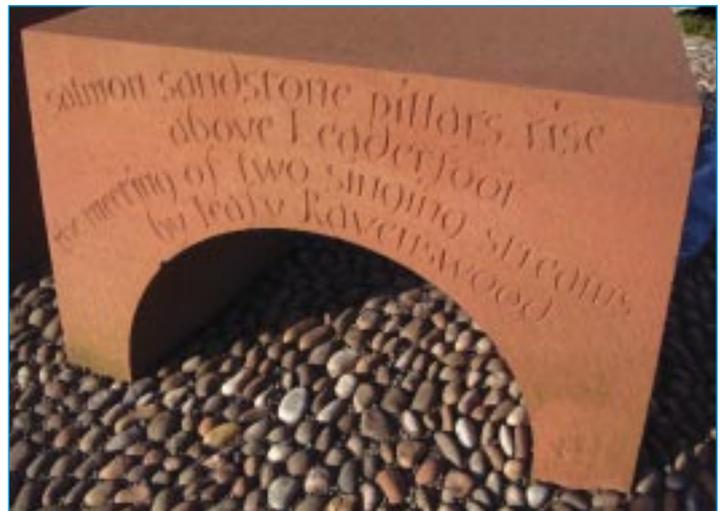
- ◆ Don't be patronising. Make sure you tell the visitors something new.
- ◆ Don't let your enthusiasm slip into a forced jollity.
- ◆ Avoid cliché.
- ◆ Don't be bossy.

## 5 Creative / Innovative Writing

You don't have to be a fashion victim. You can set trends rather than follow them. The most important rule for stylish interpretive writing is that there are no rules and many possibilities. Look out for the creative opportunities that your site provides, such as poetry and prose, so that your writing stands out in the crowd.

## Style tips

- ◆ Just do it!



### Poetry talks to people in a different way

This poem by Vallerie Gillies has been incorporated into a sculpture as part of the River Tweed Interpretation Project.

## Its as easy as... guidelines on interpretive writing

No matter what style you choose, here are some ideas about how your writing can get your ideas across more clearly.

1. **Vary the length of your sentences.** Aim for an average of ten to twenty words per sentence, and cover just one or two ideas in each sentence.
2. **Simple, short words also make your text more accessible.** If you need to use technical terms, or want your readers to understand them, put them in italics and explain them the first time you use them.
3. **Tests that assign a 'reading age' to a piece of text are usually based on counting average sentence length and word length.** Shorter sentences and shorter words make for a lower reading age, which simply means the text is easier to understand.
4. **Involve your reader by addressing them directly as 'you'.** This gives your writing a more personal feel.
5. **Suggest things for your readers to do, look for, discuss, or think about.** Ask them questions about the things or the place they are looking at, and encourage them to relate it to their own ideas and experience.
6. **Appeal to your reader's senses.** Tell your story by describing things which you can see, touch, smell or hear. Make these specific if you can, for example 'roses' or 'milk' are concrete nouns, and they conjure more vivid images in your reader's mind than abstract nouns ('love' or 'pride'), or generic ones ('flowers' or 'liquid').
7. **Use the expressions and language you'd use if you were talking to someone.** Avoid an 'official' vocabulary: it very rarely adds anything to what you want to say, and it kills any sense of life and rhythm.
8. **Use pictures, diagrams maps or graphs to get your messages across.** Words are wonderful, but I'd rather see a diagram or a model of how a combine harvester works than try to follow text that explained it.
9. **Use active verbs rather than passive where possible.** For example, try: 'Archaeologists can use evidence from below ground to re-construct the past' rather than 'Evidence from below ground can be used to re-construct the past'. Too much use of the passive sounds guarded and dull. It can also give the impression that things happen 'by themselves', and remove people from the story.
10. **If you are more concerned with the object (the person or thing affected by an action) than the agent (the person or thing doing it), then mention the object first.** Newspaper reporters would write 'Buckingham Palace was destroyed by fire this morning' rather than 'Fire destroyed Buckingham Palace this morning'.
11. **Watch your line length.** If you're doing the layout for a panel or a leaflet, keep the lines to maximum of 60 to 75 characters, including punctuation and spaces. This usually means eight to twelve words. Long lines are confusing for the subconscious part of the brain that's following the words, and this slows readers down.

Susan Cross and James Carter are Interpretation Consultants and Trainers, Tel 01298 70376 and 0131 662 4278

# research review

## Evaluating Interpret Scotland

In the last edition we enclosed a questionnaire asking for readers' views about Interpret Scotland. The aim was to help us ensure the journal is accessible and relevant to its readers, and to help with future improvements.

Thank you to everyone who returned a questionnaire. There were 117 responses, and over 90% of respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that Interpret Scotland is:

- ◆ Well designed
- ◆ Easy to read and understand
- ◆ Contains useful information
- ◆ Keeps readers in touch with new developments
- ◆ Is relevant to their work

95% of respondents read most or all of each edition. 85% agreed or strongly agreed that Interpret Scotland is inspiring. However, only 38% would be prepared to pay to receive a copy.

In terms of future content, the following preferences were recorded:

- ◆ 27% wanted more case studies
- ◆ 23% wanted more practical advice

- ◆ 18% wanted more interpretation policy and philosophy
- ◆ 15% wanted more news and reviews
- ◆ 7% wanted more letters and debate

Many suggestions were made for future themes, with 'equal access', 'funding' and 'the economic benefits of interpretation' mentioned most frequently. Problems with the readability of some editions were also noted.

Although the respondents were a self-selecting group, the results show that Interpret Scotland is generally very well-received by its audience.

There is room for improvement of course, with a need for more practical guidance, and more inspirational and challenging content. We are picking up the 'inspirational' gauntlet straight away with a new section called 'Creative Corner' below. We will also look at what other improvements could be made in future editions. As ever, your feedback and contributions are most welcome.

The lucky winner of the prize draw is Biddy Simpson of East Lothian Council. A bottle of Champagne is on the way!

## creative corner



David Masters

A creative moment inspired this simple structure on a theatrical guided walk.

We are launching a new regular feature inspired by comments received in the evaluation, and by Karen McDonald's letter in the last edition. Here Karen suggests some initial ideas to get your creativity flowing.

There is much guidance on best practice and the nuts and bolts of interpretation, and training courses have made the interpretive planning process a bedrock. But a vital ingredient in successful projects is imagination, creativity and risk-taking. How can they be encouraged in both interpreter and client?

The definition of creative in my dictionary is "creating, able to create, inventive, imaginative, showing imagination as well as routine skill". There are now books on how to develop creativity, and leading companies invest in creativity and innovation training programmes. A conference titled 'Creativity in Question' took place in Edinburgh in March 2002.

So to open a creative space, I've gathered quotes from *Zen and the Art of Making a Living, a practical guide to creative career design* by Laurence G. Bolt.

- ◆ "Colour is not painting. Notes are not music. Words are not poetry. For colour to become painting, notes, music or words, poetry, there must be knowledge of technique, emotional power, and the radiance of spirit. To view your life as art is likewise to recognise that the facts only become significant and really interesting through the application of technique, emotional power and the radiance of spirit."
- ◆ "Art is magical or, in Zen terms, marvelous, when vision, content, design and technique form an inseparable unity."
- ◆ "Art communicates awareness – consciousness."

So perhaps true creativity and innovation consists of

- ◆ Seeing what everyone else has seen
- ◆ Thinking what no-one else has thought, and
- ◆ Doing what no-one else has dared!

Karen McDonald, Interpretation Consultant, 01337 810776

"Language exerts a hidden power, like a moon on the tides"  
Rita Mae Brown, writer, *Starting from Scratch*

# letters

## Gaelic and Interpretation

Dheasaiche a charaid / Dear Editor

I am not involved in interpretation myself except as a member of the audience, but the lack of knowledge about or antipathy towards Gaelic shown by some people working in interpretation or conservation depresses me.

My children are Gaelic-speakers, and I am tired of taking them to nature trails, museums, visitor centres and the like, and them hardly seeing or hearing a word of Gaelic, even in places that claim to be about 'Highland Heritage'.

It is not a foreign language; Gaelic is the oldest language in continuous use in Scotland, and fundamental to the identity of the whole country. It has had a close relationship with the natural environment for centuries:

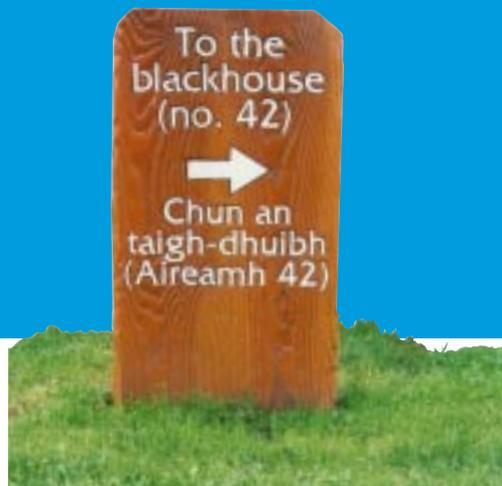
**"But what matters most about early Gaelic poetry [from the 8th century] is the enormously sympathetic tone which it adopts when dealing with wild nature. This, in the context of its own time and in the context of very many later centuries also, was little short of revolutionary."**<sup>1</sup>

The language often gives an insight into the features or use of landscape not attainable in any other way. Many so-called English place names, for example, are attempts to spell Gaelic names using English orthography and frequently have little, if any, meaning. In the original Gaelic however:

**"They had of course an important functional significance – enabling a person in a time before the existence of national grid map references to describe an exact location, or nearly so, for any object or incident. But more than that, they give to the person who uses them the ability to visualise, to focus on, the landscape to whose features they apply; they give us the possibility of mentally recreating, as it were, the topography to which they refer. And beyond this the names are themselves cultural artefacts which have their own place in and along with the language, songs, folk-tales and traditions of the culture to which they belong."**<sup>2</sup>

When Gaelic is not used appropriately in interpretation, its culture is being destroyed, yet cultural and language diversity are as important as biological diversity. It need not be like this: the interweaving of Gaelic words with English text is an imaginative and constructive approach for the visitor who does not have Gaelic. By making them aware of the existence of another language that has a unique relationship with the surrounding (which they can examine further if they wish), their experience is enriched.

However, the English experience is not the same as the Gaelic experience, and Gaelic speakers and readers are entitled to have their experience enhanced – and are also entitled not to have their language undermined. Gaelic is in a developing situation, and organisations with an interpretive remit that do not use it in a meaningful way are acting against it – because



Historic Scotland

language is involved in so many areas of their work: education, publication, signing, and so on. Therefore full bilingual texts remain crucial in many circumstances and 'interwoven' texts are a very welcome complement to them, not a substitute for them.

There are, of course, examples where good designers have produced fine English/Gaelic texts. Such productions are often the result of the understanding and commitment of a particular individual rather than of corporate policy. Too often, so-called bilingual 'design difficulties' are used as an excuse by persons unsympathetic to Gaelic for not using it where it would be appropriate. Organisations should have a proactive policy towards the use of Gaelic, with an understanding and enthusiastic supporter at a high enough level in the hierarchy who would make sure it is actually used.

It is apparent that corporate attitudes towards Gaelic can be influenced by powerful individuals who know little about it and care even less. It is ironic that the ignorance or prejudice shown towards Gaelic by some in interpretation or conservation often mirrors that sometimes shown towards interpretation and conservation.

Le deagh dhùrachd / Yours faithfully,

**John Charity**

Ullapool  
Wester Ross

<sup>1</sup>Hunter, James: *On the Other Side of Sorrow*, p 47, Mainstream 1995

<sup>2</sup>Wentworth, Roy: *Ainmean-Àite Gàidhlig air Tèarmann Nàdair Beinn Eighe/Gaelic Placenames of Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve*, p vii, SNH 1998

## A message from Australia

Dear Editor

I just wanted to let you know that I think *Interpret Scotland* is fantastic. I love the writing style – always so succinct yet delightful to read and full of interesting and useful advice for interpreters.

Congratulations! I look forward to getting the next issue!

**Pamela Harmon-Price**

Senior Interpretation Officer  
Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service  
Brisbane 4002  
Queensland  
Australia

# what's up elsewhere

## New networks for England and Wales

Hot on the heels of Interpret Scotland, the establishment of interpretation networks in both England and Wales is underway.

### English Interpretation Network

The 'English Interpretation Network' has been proposed by the Interpretation Alliance as a means of promoting best practice in England. It is envisaged the Network could achieve this through:

- ◆ A nation-wide interpretation strategy
- ◆ Training and support for individuals, communities and organisations
- ◆ Information sharing between individuals, communities and organisations
- ◆ Influencing policy
- ◆ Supporting and evaluating the work of heritage funding bodies
- ◆ Initiating and coordinating research
- ◆ Show-casing technologies, products and techniques
- ◆ Supporting more monitoring and evaluation
- ◆ Assisting the creation of local heritage trusts



Interpretation in England, like this historic re-enactment at Framlingham Castle, Suffolk, should benefit from better networking.

Proposals are being drawn up to promote the idea and to enlist support from key heritage organisations. A pilot project is planned for Devon to produce regional interpretation strategies and train community groups to produce interpretation of their own area.

For further information contact **Charlie Curnow** or **Matthew Jones** of the Interpretation Alliance on 01837 840072; [info@interpretationalliance.org.uk](mailto:info@interpretationalliance.org.uk)

**Interpret Scotland welcomes these developments, and the opportunities for networking with**

### Dehongli Cymru / Interpret Wales

A new interpretation network has been launched in Wales to take the place of the Wales Environmental Interpretation Group. Similar in composition and purpose to Interpret Scotland, Dehongli Cymru / Interpret Wales aims "to ensure that those who visit locations in Wales will be enthused about our environmental and cultural heritage."

Some initial market testing has been completed to help identify a possible work programme for the network. A contract will be let to service the network, which will deliver a range of projects potentially including:

- ◆ A newsletter
- ◆ Co-ordinated training
- ◆ Research
- ◆ Thematic factsheets
- ◆ An annual conference / workshop
- ◆ A web site
- ◆ Regional Interpretation Fora
- ◆ A contact database

Dehongli Cymru / Interpret Wales will also network with other initiatives like Interpret Scotland. A number of specific issues have also been identified that the network could address, including:

- ◆ Bilingualism
- ◆ Signs – materials, design & production
- ◆ Marketing
- ◆ Grant aid sources
- ◆ Partnerships
- ◆ Wildlife interpretation
- ◆ Cycling & interpretation

For details contact **Carl Atkinson**, Snr. Interpretive Planning Officer, Cyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru Countryside Council for Wales, Tel 01248 385484

## World interpretation conference in Denmark

An international conference on 'Nature Interpretation as a Tool in Promoting Sustainable Development' takes place in Denmark on **9-13 September 2002**.

The conference is being organised by the Danish Nature Interpretation Service with help from the International Rangers Federation, Heritage Interpretation International and the IUCN amongst others.

The conference aims to:

- ◆ Share the knowledge and experience of using nature interpretation as a tool in promoting sustainable development.
- ◆ Produce a "Code of Conduct" for nature interpretation as a tool in promoting sustainable development.
- ◆ Present examples of "best practice" and guidelines for nature interpretation in a handbook.

Delegate fees range from E710 to E875 depending on accommodation type. For details see: [www.interpretation2002.dk](http://www.interpretation2002.dk)

## Future editions

The next edition of the journal will take a look at 'Accessible Interpretation', with a copy deadline of 7 July. Subsequent editions will explore 'Meaning and Motivation: Linking Psychology and Interpretation', and 'Getting the Most from Consultants and Designers'. We would welcome offers of articles on any of these subjects.

# news and events

## Interpretation advisory web site

SNH are launching an interpretation advisory web site that contains basic guidance on key aspects of interpretation such as interpretive planning, producing interpretive panels and writing effective interpretation. You can access the site at [www.snh.gov.uk](http://www.snh.gov.uk) or through the Interpret Scotland web site [www.interpretscotland.org.uk](http://www.interpretscotland.org.uk)

## Publications

### Access for Deaf People to Museums and Galleries £5.00

This report analyses factors which make good access for people with hearing difficulties and makes recommendations on good practice. Available from Deafworks, 59 Banner Street, Clerkenwell, London EC1 8PX Tel 020 7689 0033, [general@deafworks.co.uk](mailto:general@deafworks.co.uk)

## Tell us a Story

Have you heard the one about 'the bramble bush, the bat and the cormorant', and do you know what 'adderstones' are? Answers to these and many more stories besides can be found at a new natural history story and reference web site: [www.biodiversitystories.co.uk](http://www.biodiversitystories.co.uk). The site contains a collection of stories about Scottish nature and the way people see it. It is an excellent source of material for interpreters, trainers and educators, and a growing cultural repository of the links between Scots people and the natural world. Another storytelling web site well worth a visit is [www.storytelling.co.uk](http://www.storytelling.co.uk), hosted by the Scottish Storytelling Centre. This too is an excellent source of information about storytellers and storytelling events, activities and training in Scotland.

## Prize winners in Ratho

Congratulations to the **Edinburgh Green Belt Trust**, who have won a special commendation in the recent Interpret Britain Award for their

equal access project at Ratho, Edinburgh. The judges were impressed by this '**brave and well-executed scheme**', based around the Union Canal and village of Ratho. The interpretation is designed to be accessible to a wide range of people including those with visual impairment, learning difficulties and restricted mobility. For details or to contact the Trust, log on to [www.egbt.org.uk](http://www.egbt.org.uk)

## Events

### Interpretation

Losehill Hall / TellTale  
29 April – 3 May  
Losehill Hall, Derbyshire  
£550  
Contact: Losehill Hall, Tel 01433 620373

### Evaluating & Re-Vamping Visitor Centres

Interpret Scotland  
13 May  
Glenmore Forest Visitor Centre, Aviemore  
£50.00  
Contact Eilidh Strang, SNH, 01738 444177

### Advanced Interpretive Master Planning

Interpret Scotland  
14-16 May  
Battleby Centre, Perth  
£110.00 excl. accommodation  
Contact Eilidh Strang, SNH, 01738 444177

### Working With Words

Interpret Scotland  
13 June  
Battleby Centre, Perth  
£50.00  
Contact Eilidh Strang, SNH, 01738 444177

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

(Interpretation through Information Technology)  
Interpret Scotland  
19 September  
Battleby Centre, Perth  
£50.00  
Contact Eilidh Strang, SNH, 01738 444177

### Hewn from the Living Rock

(revealing Scotland's incredible journey)  
Interpret Scotland in association with British Geological Survey  
10 October  
Crathes Castle, Banchory  
£50.00  
Contact Eilidh Strang, SNH, 01738 444177

### Lively leaflets and perky panels

Losehill Hall / TellTale  
11-12 November  
Losehill Hall, Derbyshire  
£290  
Contact: Losehill Hall, Tel 01433 620373



Edinburgh Green Belt Trust

## Scotching the Myth

By the time this edition is distributed, the Scotching the Myth conference will have taken place. The conference had sold out several weeks in advance, and we will bring a full report in the next edition. If you didn't make it, watch out for the next Interpret Scotland / Scottish Interpreters Network event.

**SOLD OUT**

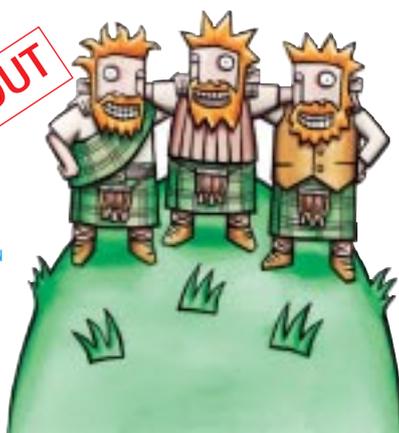


Illustration by - Glen McBeth

# Living room An Teine

# life in the blackhouse

*"Chan eil àite air thalamh cho dachaigheil ris an taigh-dubh"*  
**Han ale ah-chuh ayr halav cho dachee-ul reesh un tie-doo (phonetic translation)**

**"The blackhouse is definitely the cosiest you can find"**

This is sustainable architecture at its finest. Blending perfectly within its exposed environs, the blackhouse of Lewis is the last bastion of a built tradition stretching back at least 1,000 years. Some of the finest examples can be seen on the west coast of the island, and in the township of Arnol stands No. 42, now in the care of Historic Scotland.

The site consists of four buildings - the blackhouse at No. 42, its successor and neighbouring 'white house' (so-called because of the contrast between old and new), the consolidated shell of a further blackhouse at No. 39, and its successor white house. Historic Scotland started to draw up plans for a new visitor centre here in 1998. The white house beside No. 42 had become available and presented an opportunity to improve interpretation for the 15,000 or so visitors each year.

**"Every word in the interpretation was presented in English and Gaelic"**

It was decided that No. 42 needed to stand alone, a testament to a way of life without the clutter of a modern visitor attraction. The house was to be interpreted by the steward who would give guided tours and answer visitors' questions. The shop, ticket office and fax machine were moved out. Formal display material was reserved for the 'white house' next door. Here a small permanent exhibition was displayed adjacent to a new shop and ticket office. Orientation would be provided throughout the site and the features within the houses at No. 39 would simply be labelled.

It was recognised early on that the use of Gaelic was a key issue in any new interpretation. The Western Isles Council has a bi-lingual policy and in this area Historic Scotland is committed to following their lead. Recent figures show that, in the area immediately around the blackhouse, Gaelic is the first language of 84% of the residents. The language varies subtly in its detail from township to township, and we were fortunate in finding the services of [Annie MacSween](#), at [Lews Castle College](#) in [Stornoway](#), who provided locally accurate translations.

Every word in the interpretation was presented in [English](#) and [Gaelic](#). This extended to the orientation signage within the complex, and the minimalist labelling provided in the shell of No. 39, the abandoned blackhouse across the road. In order to keep the design clean and clear, we concentrated on using images and replacing text where we could with drawings. In respect of the content we also used extracts from the prose and poetry of Lewis to encourage an interest in the culture of the land to which the black house belonged, and to throw light on the people that lived in it.

There has been a real growth in Gaelic-medium education in recent years, and Historic Scotland has responded to this by producing our first Gaelic children's guide for Arnol in association with Museum nan Eilean, located

in Stornoway. The guide has proved popular amongst the Primary 2 and 3 children who use the site for their annual projects.

The stewards have received very positive feedback on the new displays, but it is not just local Gaelic speakers who have welcomed the approach. The blackhouse receives many German and Dutch visitors who are fascinated by the language. They often ask the bi-lingual stewards to speak in Gaelic to hear how the language is spoken.

**"Gaelic is the first language of 84% of the residents"**

The appeal of the Gaelic language and culture is not to be underestimated - it is clearly on the increase. After a successful pilot, Sabhal Mor Ostaig<sup>1</sup> on Skye are now running an Access to Gaelic course which can be attended using long-distance learning (thanks also to them for the translation of 'Interpret Scotland' on the front cover). The bi-lingual approach adopted at Arnol provides a valuable resource for local Gaelic speakers and adds to the sense of place for all visitors. As interpreters we can play a constructive role in promoting both the language and its written form - we can do this in the very places where the Gaelic language is most pertinent, and further afield through the use of poetry, prose and technology.

**Emma Carver, Historic Scotland, 0131 668 8600**



*Donald Dewar was really taken with the Blackhouse when he opened the new display.*

<sup>1</sup> Useful Gaelic language contacts:

- ◆ Comunn na Gàidhlig Alba (CNAG), [www.cnag.org.uk](http://www.cnag.org.uk)
- ◆ Sabhal Mor Ostaig and Cànan Ltd, [www.smo.uhi.ac.uk](http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk)
- ◆ Fosglan (Cultural Services Agency) Lews Castle College, Stornoway, [www.lews.uhi.ac.uk](http://www.lews.uhi.ac.uk)