



Exhibition design
Interpretive Guidelines



Think in pictures
Deaf sign Interpretation



Multicultural Britain
Access for all



Points of Departure
High tech interpretation

the journal for Scotland's Interpreters

Interpret Scotland

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'A' Foillseachadh na h-Alba



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



Access *noun*. The right or opportunity to use or benefit from something

Accessible *adjective*. Able to be reached or entered. Easily understood or appreciated.

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Breaking barriers

How good is your interpretation? Pretty good, I hear you reply. But is it truly accessible to your visitors..?

Most UK interpreters are well-educated, able bodied and Anglo Saxon – and so are many of our visitors. But not all of them. In fact, a substantial minority of our actual and *potential* visitors will (or would) routinely encounter barriers that exclude them from a meaningful interpretive experience.

These barriers might be physical, such as panels fixed too high for someone in a wheelchair to read. They might be sensory, such as text that is too small for someone with poor eyesight to read. They might be intellectual, such as written language that's too complex for people with poor literacy to understand. They might be cultural, such as reference points that do not relate to the cultural experience of ethnic minority visitors.

In this edition we address some of the issues around accessible interpretation. Commissioning a balanced range of articles has been a challenge this time: there are many good examples of interpretation that meet physical access criteria. But *sensory*, *intellectual* and *cultural* access are still 'Cinderella' subjects that need far more attention.

The access debate is really only starting, spurred on by the Disability Discrimination Act and the social inclusion agenda. As interpreters we are beginning to meet the needs of a wider audience. We're starting to involve these previously excluded audiences in developing our interpretation. Let's celebrate this progress, but be aware that more needs to be done. And as if this weren't enough to galvanise action, an overarching message from this edition is that getting access right, in all its dimensions, improves the visitor experience for everyone.

David Masters, Editor

Ps. In this edition we also test a larger typeface to improve legibility, and in future all articles will be available as large print versions from our web site www.interpretscotland.org.uk. As ever, let us know what you think.

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 Sandra Phipps at Scottish Natural Heritage on 01738 444177 email: sandra.phipps@snh.gov.uk. You could also visit the Interpret Scotland website: www.interpretscotland.org.uk

Next edition

The next edition of the journal will take a look at 'Technology and Interpretation! Copy deadline is 1 December 2002.

"Equal Rights were created for everyone."
Contestant in 1990 Mr. New Jersey Male pageant

access all areas?

Delivering equal access is an important challenge to Scottish interpreters. Those who benefit most directly include those with 'disabilities', but equal access benefits us all as individuals and as a society.

There are four key reasons why we must deliver equal access for people with disabilities:

- ◆ It is a basic human right
- ◆ It is a legal requirement under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)¹
- ◆ It improves interpretation for everyone
- ◆ It makes economic sense

Human rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that people have a right to equal access to public services, and to participate in the cultural life of the community. These rights are *universal*.

Statistics on people with disabilities are available from a number of sources², but there are substantial numbers in our population. For example, there are an estimated 8.7 million disabled people in the UK who are *not* wheelchair users. One in four UK families has a disabled member, and one in five adults has poor literacy. Considering their interpretive needs is a fundamental to respecting their (and our) human rights.

Disability Discrimination Act

Since 1996 the DDA has made it illegal to treat disabled people less favourably than others. Any service providers (including museums, visitor centres and heritage sites) have to make 'reasonable adjustments' to provide for disabled users. While what is regarded as 'reasonable' is a grey area, it is important to realise that there are a wide range of things that can be done.

The starting point should be an access audit to identify what is required. A number of bodies undertake access audits, including ADAPT and the Joint Mobility Unit³. These can be expensive, and a full-scale audit may be beyond the reach of smaller facilities. Using local groups to find out problems with your facility is an alternative, and demonstrates your awareness of the issues.

Social Services Departments may be able to help make initial contacts. You can then invite groups of people with disabilities and community bodies to your facility and talk over any access issues they might have with your facility and its interpretation.

Everyone benefits

Many improvements made for people with disabilities help other visitors. Physical modifications like lifts, ramps and easily opened



Equal access is a universal right

doors help those with wheelchairs, parents with buggies, those with a broken leg or arthritis, and older people who tire easily. Clear labels in conjunction with good lighting helps visitors with poor sight while making it easier for everyone to read. Any visitor will find it difficult to read text printed over a distracting background, or find it hard to distinguish spoken words on an audio guide with loud background music or sound effects. People with poor literacy or who don't speak English as their first language can be put off by text that appears too demanding. Considering their needs will make your interpretation more accessible to all.

The bottom line

More people with 'disabilities' are living in the community than before. They expect to participate in the same activities as everyone else. This can often mean they want to visit in a family group or with friends. If your institution is not accessible, they won't come, and you will lose the entire group. On the other hand, a reputation for good access can bring visitors with disabilities, along with friends and family, from a considerable distance.

It makes financial sense to consider equal access when planning any interpretation and to get advice *before the process is well advanced*. Accessibility should be integral, not an afterthought, and local consultation is a good start to achieving this, whether you are planning a new display or refurbishing an old one.

Ann Rayner INTACT, email a.rayner@tesco.net

¹See www.disability.gov.uk for details

²Informability Manual, Wendy Gregory, HMSO 1996; Disability Directory for Museums and Galleries, Resource, 2001

³For contact details see page 6

"The first problem in any design situation is to discover what the problem really is."

Anonymous designer

The design challenge

Imagine you've retired, you're not as sprightly as you used to be and you're visiting a new exhibition at your local museum, gallery or heritage site. You arrive a little puffed; so you decide to sit down while you get out your specs to read the guidebook before looking round. But where do you sit? The only seating is low down, with no arms or back to grip as you bend your creaking knees. You fear that, once seated, you might be unable to get up again; so on second thoughts you decide to start looking at the exhibition, which is about birds of the Scottish Highlands.

As you enter, you are dismayed to find the lighting is very subdued: why? You find a notice explaining that it is to prevent the colours of the birds' feathers from fading. You understand; but it means that you can't quite read the information about the birds because it is too small for you to see clearly in low light.

Disappointed, you sit down to watch an AV presentation on the Capercaillie. The pictures are beautifully clear but you can't say the same about the soundtrack. These days you find it difficult to listen to two sounds at once, and a burst of fiddle music drowns out the commentary just when it's telling you how Capercaillie mate. And what is polygyny anyway? You wish they wouldn't use technical words without explaining what they mean.

As you come away you reflect that, although you have never thought of yourself as disabled, the exhibition has disabled you. It has put unnecessary obstacles in the way of your understanding and enjoyment.

"Although you have never thought of yourself as disabled, the exhibition has disabled you."

This scenario shows how we in the heritage business can do a disservice to our visitors through not understanding their needs. That disservice is so much greater when the visitor uses a wheelchair, carries a white stick, wears a hearing aid or is dyslexic – to list just some forms of disability. Under the Disability Discrimination Act we have to take reasonable steps to make our services, including exhibitions, accessible for disabled people.

Staff of the National Museums of Scotland have addressed this by compiling a manual of the statutory access requirements relevant to exhibitions, together with all the advice on inclusive exhibition design they can find. *Exhibitions for All, a practical guide to designing inclusive exhibitions*¹ deals firstly with physical access features such as ramps, lifts and automatic doors. However, it also covers matters of sensory and intellectual access, which affect many, many more than the 5% (approximately) of disabled people who use wheelchairs.

A major part of the guidelines deals with 'Communication and Display', and in particular with the written word. Here advice provided by Mencap and the Plain English Campaign, amongst



Phil Dagnell

First person interpretation is the most effective, but how should designers respond to the needs of older people?

others, was used to draw up the guidelines for drafting text that is easily understood. Advice from the Joint Mobility Unit helped to establish guidelines for presenting text (and images) clearly and in a suitable font and type size. Advice from *Access in Mind* by Ann Rayner and *The Informability Manual*² by Wendy Gregory was used to suggest alternatives to print, such as symbols, audio-guides and exhibits that can be touched or smelt. The necessity for making audio-visual presentations accessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing people is addressed, with advice on the use of subtitles and induction loops.

One of the two most important messages in the manual is "know your audience". It is essential to consult some of your intended audience before, during and after the exhibition's development so that you provide a service that is as accessible as possible to them. The other message, which has become almost a mantra, is "better access for disabled people means better access for all".

**Christine Thompson, NMS Education & Access Liaison Officer,
Tel 0131 247 4435**

¹ Available from Dot Western, Department of Technical Services, National Museums of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JF. £5 to members of MAGDA (the Museums and Galleries Disability Association), £10 otherwise © NMS

² See the publications list on page 11

"Not the senses I have but what I do with them is my kingdom."

Helen Keller (1880-1968) pioneering deafblind activist and writer

hear me, feel me

Interpretation that is universal and multi-sensory benefits everyone. This is a simple statement, but in practice universal and multi-sensory designs are rarely used.

For many years The Dog Rose Trust has researched facilities that enable the blind and visually impaired to access and appreciate all environments. In Scotland we developed the *Dorcas Project*, an interactive system using 3-D models, tactile plans and objects. We were given a model of Glasgow Cathedral Precinct, which we refurbished and fitted with a sound system that activated a commentary for each area of the precinct. The audio, relayed through infra-red headsets, tells the listener about the history, architecture and function of the building. As it was recorded in situ, it also tells them what each place sounds like, and sound, touch and vision combine to make the experience more meaningful for everyone.

Sounds are far more than words – they convey atmosphere, express the character of an exhibit, and reinforce a message. The Trust uses sound in many situations: at a motor museum where each decade of motoring has its own signature tune and the sound of the cars is incorporated in the audio guide; to interpret a modern painting by recording the words written on the painting mixed with music and



A visually impaired child exploring the model of Glasgow Cathedral by touch whilst listening to the audio commentary

characteristic sounds; on a windswept Shropshire hilltop by a stone circle where the sound of the skylarks mingles with the ghostly sound of distant medieval bagpipes.

Audio information, tactile tracks, accessible signage, and sound icons are among the many ways in which the experience of those with poor sight, and everyone else too, can be enhanced.

Julia Ionides and Peter Howell, The Dog Rose Trust,
Tel 01584 874567

The Dog Rose Trust

think in pictures

How can we communicate effectively with our deaf visitors and help them feel welcome at our sites?

When working as a ranger, I became frustrated that I could not interpret my site to deaf visitors. That moved me to learn deaf sign language, exploring a world that was both familiar and different to the one I knew. I found sign language had accent and dialect, but that some deaf people lip-read instead of sign. I learnt polite ways of attracting attention: to gently touch a shoulder; to wave a hand in front of a face; or to tap a shared table. I discovered the incredible subtlety of deaf sign poetry, whose nuance of multiple blended signs and body language wove deep and clear messages.

My memories and comprehension are linked as much to sound as sight. To help me understand deafness, one of my sign tutors shared with me ways in which he

experienced the world. He often noticed far more detail of the image than I did. The picture took the place of sounds in his memories. For me recollection of a forest wind might mean the sound of tree leaves rustling. My tutor might remember the sight of branches moving, or the sunlight making patterns on the ground.

Over time my deaf visitors came for guided walks, school trips and stories, and I learned much from this experience: In the first instance, relate to what deaf people know, using references to what can be seen. You can't simply say how one bird sounds similar to another. If you have to interpret sound, find tangible ways to relate it to your audience. Standing on a wooden floor, you might demonstrate the way a rainstorm rises

and quiets with finger snapping building to a crescendo of thunder stamping feet. When interpreting for deaf visitors, the best advice is simple: *to think in pictures – not sound.*

To sign everyday chat is something that anyone can learn, although to sign well is a complex skill. Consider partnering with professional deaf sign interpreters for a more technical guided walk or presentation. The Royal National Institute for the Deaf is a useful source for information, guidance and local contacts: www.rnid.org.uk Tel 0808 808 0123.

Hugh Muschamp, Chair of the Scottish Interpretation Network and Project Officer for the Paths for All Partnership,
Tel 01259 218888

"He is able who thinks he is able."

Buddha

hands On!

Inverness Museum and Art Gallery is a busy museum with about 100,000 visitors a year. In 2001 it won the Cramond Award for the museum that has done the most to promote access for visitors with learning disabilities.

We had received requests for some time for more objects to be on show, and for family and child-friendly facilities. An award from the Heritage Lottery Fund presented the opportunity to develop such a display - *Hands on the Highlands*. It was designed to be as welcoming as possible, and a key feature was that it was to be accessible to all and user-friendly for people with disabilities and learning difficulties.

The display was not specifically aimed at people with learning difficulties, but the approach we took was particularly relevant to them. Museum staff consulted widely with individuals and groups. INTACT (the Intellectual Access Trust) provided valuable contacts, and local day centres came with clients on a series of visits.

The resulting new centre is versatile and innovative, with modular mobile units housing the collections and technology including touch screen presentations, a roof-mounted camera, video microscope, and a satellite weather program. Its uniqueness stems from the fact that real objects are at the centre of the design.

Hands on the Highlands has moved away from the traditional didactic methods of presentation to encourage and promote self-learning. Adults enjoy showing children how to use the facility, and both enjoy discovering it for themselves. The bright colours and attractive layout are appreciated by people of all ages, and the attractive graphics help set a welcoming and informal tone. The centre is now well-used by local groups of people with learning difficulties.

**Catharine Nevin, Curator, Inverness Museum and Art Gallery,
Tel 01463 237114**



The bright colours and accessible design are appreciated by visitors of all ages and abilities.

Disability Access directory

The following organisations can provide information and advice on equal access issues:

The ADAPT Trust 0141 556 2233
www.adapttrust.co.uk. A body that undertakes and advises on access audits.

Disability Discrimination Act Helpline 0345 622633
www.disability.gov.uk. Information about the DDA and its implications.

Disability Rights Commission
www.drc-gb.org. A body that tackles disability discrimination, promotes best practice and presses for legal and policy changes.

Disability Scotland
0131 229 8632
www.disabilityscotland.org.uk
A national umbrella body of organisations of and for disabled people.

Fieldfare Trust 01334 657708
www.fieldfare.org.uk. A body providing advice and grants on equal access to the countryside.

INTACT – The Intellectual Access Trust 0131 667 1461.
A body promoting access for people with learning and communication difficulties.

Joint Mobility Unit Access Partnership 0131 311 8526
www.jmuaccess.org.uk. Access consultants supported by the Royal National Institute for the Blind and The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association.

The Dog Rose Trust
01584 874567
www.dogrose-trust.org.uk.
A body that promotes access and interpretation for people who are blind and visually impaired.

Some useful publications include:

Access for Deaf People to Museums and Galleries: A review of good practice in London. Deafworks, London

Access in Mind: towards the inclusive museum A. Rayner, INTACT, Edinburgh

Barrier-free design: A manual for building designers and managers. J. Holmes-Siedle, Butterworth

BT Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines: A good practice guide to disabled people's access in the countryside. BT Countryside for All

Building Sight: A handbook of building and interior design solutions to include the needs of visually impaired people. P. Barker et al, Joint Mobility Unit, London

Colour and contrast: a design guide to the use of colour and contrast to improve the built environment for visually impaired people. CD-Rom available from Dulux Tel: 0870 242 1100

Design Insight journal. Joint Mobility Unit, London

Disability Discrimination Act 1995: An introduction for small and medium sized businesses. HMSO, London

Exhibitions for All: A practical guide to designing inclusive exhibitions. National Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh

Informability Manual in the Disability Directory for Museums and Galleries. Resource, HMSO

Sign Design Guide – a guide to inclusive signage. P. Barker & J. Fraser, Joint Mobility Unit, London

"Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world."

Albert Einstein (1875-1955) physicist and philosopher

multicultural access

The recent opening of the Commonwealth Games in Manchester vividly shows how ethnically diverse the Commonwealth is, including the different countries which form the United Kingdom. Diversity has always been our historical reality. This diversity can be seen in our amalgamation of different cultures over many centuries, and the dramatic effects of this on our built and natural heritage.

There has been a long presence of Black people in the British Countryside. An African garrison was stationed at Hadrian's Wall during the Roman era, and it is estimated there were 10,000 Black people in rural Britain in the eighteenth century. Today there are large numbers of ethnic minority people living in Britain, and London is the most multicultural city in the world. But many minority groups still feel excluded from our countryside and heritage sites.

Failure to understand and interpret our multicultural world can lead to people feeling misrepresented or unrepresented. It also denies everyone access to a full understanding of where we come from and how things have come to be the way they are! Multicultural interpretation benefits everyone.

Minority groups are becoming increasingly vocal in demanding more accurate and representative interpretation. "Opium deal settles exhibition row" in the May 25th edition of the Glasgow Herald explains the outrage from 17 Chinese communities in the UK, when an exhibition of one of Britain's infamous traders, the East India Company, failed to reflect the company's part in what led to the Opium Wars between Britain and China.

Interpretation does not happen in a vacuum. It is set in the context of personal, cultural and organisational world views. The acceptance of a multi-cultural British history changes how all of us see ourselves in Britain and within the world, repositioning minority cultural communities in the social history of contemporary society.

The inclusion of the multi-cultural facets of sites and collections makes them more meaningful and accessible to ethnic minorities. It is part of the process of the healing of a society that can contribute to the repositioning of inter-cultural relationships in the world.

Towards inclusive interpretation

To be more inclusive, our interpretation institutions need to:

- ◆ Move away from the dominant and mythical mono-culture that is no longer relevant to the contemporary world
- ◆ Fill the interpretive gap in Britain's multi-cultural history and heritage
- ◆ Re-define how participation in interpretation by ethnic communities should happen, and embody these transformed concepts in new access policies and strategies.

To do this, they should undertake initiatives which will:

- ◆ Uncover the currently invisible multi-cultural aspects of local and national history
- ◆ Encourage, support and assist ethnic communities in making connections with relevant aspects of their local and national history and heritage

Editor's note:

The cultural dimensions of how we understand and relate to the world are important issues for interpreters. Many of the issues touched on in Interpret Scotland are culturally determined, and we hope to explore this in a future edition of the journal. As ever, your views and ideas are much appreciated.



- ◆ Encourage, support and assist ethnic communities in the creation of new artefacts which embody and celebrate cultural memory, multi-cultural history and heritage
- ◆ Enable the wider population to see themselves positively in the context of Britain's multi-cultural history and heritage.

Black Environment Network

The future

The role of multicultural interpretation cannot be underestimated in advancing the cause of equal access and social inclusion. Its power lies in the shaping of the big picture of interpretation in which all of us see ourselves - the playing out of the shifting balance between who we are, how we are seen and who we can be. Multicultural interpretation must be recognised and resourced as a force to understand our past and to help build a better society for all.

Henry Adomako and Judy Ling Wong OBE,
Black Environment Network,
Tel 0131 622 7171

References and contacts:

- ◆ *Interpretation Journal* published by the Association for Heritage Interpretation, spring 2001 issue on Interpreting Cultural Identity.
- ◆ *Museum Practice* published by the Museums Association, edition 17 on Diversity.
- ◆ *Multicultural Interpretation and Access to Heritage*. BEN Paper. Downloadable free from BEN website www.ben-network.org.uk
- ◆ *Archive of Black History*, Tel 0207 326 4154

"Uncertainty and mystery are energies of life. Don't let them scare you, for they keep boredom at bay and spark creativity"

R.I.Fitzhenry, Editor Barnes and Noble Book of Quotations, 1987

research review

OPENspace

OPENspace – the Research Centre for Inclusive Access to Outdoor Environments – was launched earlier this summer. This new research initiative will focus primarily on issues relating to disability and social inclusion in the landscape, and is a collaboration between Edinburgh College of Art and Heriot-Watt University.

Many studies have shown that being outdoors is good for people's health and emotional well-being. The outdoors can also be a great social leveller, providing a place where everyone can come together on an equal footing, regardless of background, age and ethnicity. However, if you are disabled, opportunities to experience and interact with the natural environment in a meaningful way can be few and far between.

Legislation may have forced facilities to open up physical access to the outdoors, but are a few disabled parking spaces and ramps really a substitute for engagement and experience?

Is information and experiential access the next barrier? With this in mind a PhD studentship is being set up between OPENspace, The Sensory Trust and The Eden Project to explore and develop innovative interpretation for people with disabilities.

The findings of two recent studies, supported by the Forestry Commission, have already been presented. The first addressed 'Local Open Space and Social Inclusion' for five communities in central Scotland and their local woodlands. A key finding was the over-riding influence of childhood experiences on adult use of woodlands. Also highlighted was the importance of visitor information in making people feel welcome, as well as allaying fears about personal safety or becoming lost.

The second study was on the effectiveness of wayfinding systems, and it explored and evaluated the sources of information visitors use to find and maximise their experience of forest sites. Case studies across Britain highlighted the challenge of providing visitors with the right information, at the

right place and in the right format. Where visitor information was available it was not always assimilated because it was inappropriately located, in an inaccessible format, or simply 'too much too soon'. This project is now into a second phase to assess the 'goodness of fit' between site and user information needs, as well as developing benchmarking criteria.

Other work in progress include baseline studies on the use of the outdoors environment by people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and teenagers. Interpret Scotland will report on results as they emerge.

To find out more about OPENspace contact Dr Cathy Findlay on 0131 221 6277.

Editor's note: We are looking for a volunteer to help source material for the research review, and to act as a link to the research community. Please contact the editor if you are interested.



Reflected words help people to look and see in a different way

Creative Corner

A striking circular poem written around a pond inside Glasgow Botanic Garden has caused visitors to stop and reflect for a moment.

The poem, *A Perception of Ferns*, by Gael Turnbull is itself circular, having no beginning or end. Readers start from where they are and follow it as they wish. It encourages them to look at the fern in the middle of the pool, and to notice other elements of the site. The pond is in the entrance to the glasshouse and is a focal point for visitors. It is a striking feature with beautiful reflections of the curved glass roof of the palace.

This is one of several pieces developed by Gerry Loose, writer in residence. He also used horticultural name-plates to surprise visitors by including quotes or very short poems. An inscribed stone next to a newly planted Persimmon carries a two-word poem, 'Flame, Flower', the latin name of Persimmon, and 'Nagasaki'. This raises questions or stops visitors and encourages them to reflect on the planting. The poem does not provide any answers, leaving people to make their own connections. In fact the Persimmon was grown from the seed of the only Persimmon tree to survive the bombing of Nagasaki.

These poems are a brilliant example of creative work that is reaching visitors and enhancing the site. Gerry Loose can be contacted at dharma46@hotmail.com

Kev Theaker, Scottish Agricultural College, Tel 01292 525282

"Education is the movement from darkness to light"
Alan Bloom (1939-2001), US writer and teacher

what's ^{up} elsewhere

Points of Departure

What begins in California inevitably ends up here, and for museums and galleries, that means more hi-tech interpretation.

In 2001 the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art developed an experimental exhibition called *Points of Departure: Connecting with Contemporary Art*, based on 60 works by artists such as Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol. Visitors explore the galleries using an iPAQ Pocket PC. These lightweight "wireless" computers show thumbnails of the artworks on their high-resolution color screens. By clicking on the images, visitors can access original video footage or archival clips of the artists talking about their work.

Each of the galleries focuses thematically on an aspect of contemporary art, such as the use of objects, the presence of language in art, and issues of individual style. To facilitate each visitor's open-ended process of seeing and understanding these challenging themes, every gallery contains a "Smart Table". Driven by a built-in computer, these devices display images, video and text on a flat, interactive screen set in a tabletop. The Smart Tables provide immediate access to in-depth, multimedia commentary by the exhibition's curators introducing the theme and ideas of each section of the show. The Smart Tables also provide commentary by other curators and artists, along with introductions to key works on view and activities related to the art.

The third experimental technology is a curatorial game that allows visitors to construct their own exhibition by re-hanging works in the exhibition in a virtual gallery in whichever way they like. The "Make Your Own Gallery" kiosks, located in a study gallery near the exit of the exhibition, provide visitors with a fun way to explore their own themes and ideas.

In an additional study gallery, visitors are encouraged to explore *Making Sense of Modern Art*, the Museum's multimedia introduction to 20th century art. It includes a new section on artists and work in *Points of Departure*, as well as extensive information about other work in the Museum's collection.

According to Curator John Weber, "Multimedia technologies, judiciously and intelligently deployed, offer one of the most powerful means of helping museum visitors achieve insights and illuminations about these works. By making the ideas, historical context, social and biographical conditions and voices of art history more readily available, museums can provide visitors with an enhanced capacity to enjoy contemporary art and new ways to assess their responses to it."



Visitors explore the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art using 'wireless' technology

Meanwhile, at San Francisco's *Exploratorium* children's science museum, wireless technology has been developed yet further. Here, infrared information beacons automatically connect with handheld computers to deliver interpretive content about the nearest exhibit via specially constructed web pages.

The educational use of this new technology is being evaluated by computer giant Hewlett Packard. A typical scenario for a school's visit goes something like this: In the classroom children visit the *Exploratorium* web site and develop their own web pages of ideas and questions about the exhibits. At the museum, they use handheld PCs to pick up their own web pages and the *Exploratorium* pages. They explore the exhibits, following the links that interest them most and making notes as they go. They then use networked digital cameras to take photos of the exhibits, save them to their web page, and communicate with each other using a bulletin board.

Back in the classroom the web sites are downloaded and a series of projects completed on the exhibition and their experience of it. Here, the subject matter and the educational media combine to create a powerful learning experience about science and technology.

Interpretation using wireless technology is planned or underway at a number of UK galleries and museums, including Tate Modern. Ultra-new technology - it's coming your way soon...

See www.sfmoma.org for further information.

Editors note: the next edition of the journal will take a look at the use of new technology in interpretation, drawing on an Interpret Scotland seminar on the same subject.

"I have a quotation for everything- it saves original thinking."

Dorothy L. Sayers, 1893-1957, writer

letters

Don't ignore Gaelic

Dear Editor

I have just discovered your excellent magazine "Interpret Scotland/a' Foillseachadh na h-Alba" - more by chance than anything else - and I found Issue 5 most interesting and stimulating, particularly as I am a Gaelic speaker who feels so often that the bodies with responsibility for interpretation in Scotland simply ignore our language.

John Charity's letter was as good a summary of the issues with regard to Gaelic interpretation as I have seen - this would be a better country if he were in charge of interpretation! Like him, I have taken my children to umpteen visitor facilities and, as Gaelic is our natural language, we are forever having to translate from English to discuss exhibits, signs etc, even when they represent the cultural heritage of our own country. It is pretty galling.

Not only that, but I know from my own experience in many foreign countries that it is delightful to see the local language exhibited even if I do not understand it myself - it often leads to fascinating conversations about the country's national or regional heritage and certainly enriches my experience as a visitor. This is surely the same for visitors to our own country. Gaelic says to them - "welcome to our unique and beautiful country of which we are proud."

Le deagh dhùrachd

Ruairidh MacIlleathain

Inverness

IV2 3XP

Spoken Language

Dear Editor

The Scottish Tourist Guides Association is fully committed to interpretation for visitors in their own language. Amongst our members we can offer tours in 18 languages from Chinese Madarin to Swedish. All our language guides are fluent in the languages they offer and are subject to strict assessment before they are allowed to guide in the languages.

We also have guides fluent in Gaelic and run Gaelic for Guides courses as part of Continuous Professional Development so that our members can pronounce names and places correctly and give visitors a taste of Gaelic. We believe that it is vital for the industry to offer good language interpretation and we would like to see much better provision in visitor attractions as well as accommodation and catering outlets. Many of our guides also offer translation services which could be used much more by the industry.

Rosalind Newlands

STGA Training Manager

Edinburgh



'Token' Gaelic language interpretation at Culloden may not reflect the significance of the site to Gaelic speakers

Gaelic policy

Dear Editor

Congratulations to Caroline Tempest for an excellent article in the last edition. Given the current debate on The National Trust for Scotland Gaelic Policy (or lack of), and our decision to proceed with our own Gaelic policy for Culloden, it is also very well timed.

The recent delivery of signs at Culloden and the token element of Gaelic highlights the very points made by John Charity in his letter. I could not have put it better. We have struggled for years to overcome apathy and intolerance towards Gaelic, and need to follow the lead set by SNH.

Angus Jack

Regional Buildings Surveyor

National Trust for Scotland

Highlands and Islands

Fancy a trip to the US?

Expressions of interest are sought for an interpretation study tour to the west coast of the USA. The trip is being organised by Bill Taylor with assistance from Sam Ham, and is likely to take in such classic sites as Monterey Aquarium, Alcatraz, Yosemite, Mount St Helens and Mount Rainier. Timing sometime summer 2003: cost between £1,000-£1,500. Contact bftnet@bill20.freereserve.co.uk

news, reviews & events

Publications

The Manual of Museum Exhibitions
Barry Lord and Gail Dexter Lord (2002)
Altmira press ISBN 0 7591 0234 1,
544pp, £33.95

This wide-ranging and comprehensive book explores all the key issues involved in developing museum exhibitions. It addresses both the philosophical basis for the function of museums and their exhibits, and an array of practical matters relating to the planning, design, construction, running and evaluating of exhibitions. There are chapters on project management, the curatorial process, equipment and facilities, interpretive planning, exhibition accessibility, scripting, and exhibition retail, amongst others. Much of the content is reinforced with a series of practical case studies from museums around the world.

This is a valuable book on a broad subject, with many useful insights into the 'bigger picture' of museum exhibitions. It is good to see a section dedicated to interpretive planning, although it presents a simplified planning model and uses terminology that most heritage interpreters would fail to recognise. Don't let this put you off though – if you want a single textbook about museum exhibitions, this is it.



Scotching the Myth

Scotland's first national interpretation conference was a great success, with over 200 participants enjoying site visits, presentations, workshops, a trade show and the beautiful surroundings of the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh. The Scottish Interpretation Network, who organised the conference with support from Interpret Scotland, are keen to organise future events. If you would like to get involved, join SIN at www.scotinterpnet.org.uk

Interpretation advisory website

SNH have launched an interpretation advisory web site, which 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 or through the Interpret Scotland web site: www.interpretsotland.org.uk

Events

Hewn from the Living Rock
Interpret Scotland in association with British Geological Survey
10 October Crathes Castle, Banchory
£50.00. Contact Lorna Brown, SNH,
01738 444177

Lively leaflets and perky panels
Losehill Hall / TellTale
11-12 November Losehill Hall, Derbyshire
£290.00. Contact: Losehill Hall,
Tel 01433 620373

WFTGA Convention 2003
10th World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations Convention Sustainable Tourism Dunblane, Scotland
26 - 31 January 2003
Hosted by the Scottish Tourist Guides Association. Tel 01786 451953 or www.stga.co.uk for details

Objects of Admiration: interpreting museum collections for the public
Scottish Museums Council
12 February 2003. £75.00 members / £97.00 non members. Contact: SMC Training, Tel 0131 467 8453

Writing effectively for your visitors
Scottish Museums Council
6 March 2003. £75.00 members / £97.00 non members. Contact: SMC Training, Tel 0131 467 8453

National Museum Audit

A national audit of museums and galleries has been carried out by the Scottish Museums Council (SMC). As the largest survey of its kind it covers over 12 million objects held in trust for the people of Scotland. A number of issues were examined including provisions for equal access. Here the findings show room for improvement:

- ◆ Only 23% of museum organisations have carried out an access audit in the last five years
- ◆ In most organisations less than 25% of staff have undertaken DDA training
- ◆ Less than half of museum organisations, and less than a third of local authority organisations, have an access policy

Jane Ryder, SMC director, said "The importance of the results cannot be overestimated in demonstrating both the extent of our distributed national collection and the contribution the museum sector makes to our cultural, economic and social life." The full report is available from the SMC, Tel 0131 229 7465.



big beinn does the talking

The peaks and pines of Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve in Wester Ross are the focus of a new accessible visitor centre and trails recently opened by Scottish Natural Heritage.

The new facilities consist of four *Talking Trails* under the banner: 'Let your mind do the walking, Beinn Eighe do the talking.' The concept was put together by John Finlay Associates to provide physical and intellectual access for visitors of all abilities. This proved attractive to sponsors, with funding coming from the Heritage Lottery Fund, European Union, Ross and Cromarty Enterprise and SNH.

Beinn Eighe is Britain's oldest National Nature Reserve and embraces the largest of our western native pinewoods. The woods are known as 'temperate rainforest' thanks to the area's high rainfall, and the damp conditions sustain a rich assortment of mosses and liverworts. The reserve is also known for its dragonflies and its typical West Highland species including deer, eagle and pine marten.

30,000 visitors explore this great swathe of remote and rugged ground each year. Many walk the reserve's spectacular Woodland and Mountain Trails. However,

for others these are too long and strenuous, and SNH wanted to construct shorter walks on lower ground.

The *Talking Trails* project provided an effective solution, allowing the many people who had hitherto felt excluded to discover what makes Beinn Eighe special. The exhibition includes computer touch screen games, hands-on models and an audio-visual presentation, while the outdoor trails feature tree tales, playful poetry and striking wood and rock art, as well as great scenic views.

Each of the trails offers a different interpretive approach:

Outside-In Trail

The visitor centre exhibition is laid out as an indoor trail using varying floor levels and surfaces. Featuring a series of twists and turns, and a wide variety of graphic, three-dimensional and interactive displays, the exhibits aim to involve visitors in their 'journey'. Textual styles are mixed in order to accommodate the varied intellectual needs and capacities of visitors.

Picnic Trail

A question and answer game sets out to link human picnics with the food that the creatures of the NNR eat. The questions appear on the visitor centre wall in the form of circular, plate-like panels, with the answers mounted on posts alongside the trail.

Rhyming Trail

The trail panels feature a variety of provocative and humorous riddles. This light-hearted but informative approach aims to help visitors discover more about the wildlife and natural processes of the

woodland. Each riddle has an associated panel a short distance away, which provides the answer along with some woodland interpretation.

Ridge Trail

Visitors are encouraged to explore the lower slopes of Beinn Eighe, appreciate the forces that created the landscape and discover a bit about what SNH is doing to protect and enhance the reserve. It introduces a more contemplative style, with excerpts of Gaelic poetry (English translations alongside), supported by brief commentaries on key topics.

SNH brought in expertise on all abilities access through the Fieldfare Trust and the Joint Mobility Unit to ensure the development was as accessible as possible for disabled people. Fieldfare also organised local consultation with disabled representatives from DASH (Disability Action Scottish Highlands) and the Skye and Lochalsh Disability Access Group. Both gave useful comments on changes that would help them – and people with other disabilities – get the most from the site, and were interested in re-visiting after completion to provide further feedback.

This integrated all-abilities Visitor Centre and associated trails is a first for the West Highlands. SNH sees it as a significant advance in its bid to provide people with greater opportunities to take pride in their natural heritage and offer them enhanced facilities to understand and enjoy it to the full.

John Walters, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel 01463 723100

John MacPherson, SNH



On the picnic trail... Linking our diet with what the creatures eat