



Count your cherry stones



Pushing the limits?



Beyond information



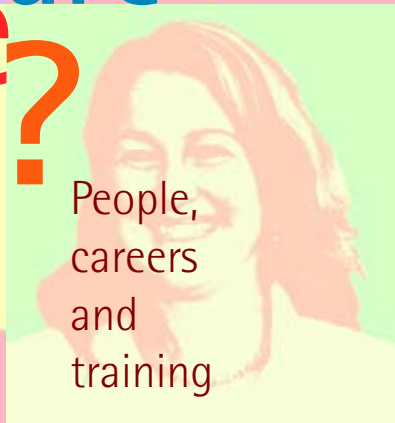
Caught in a web

the journal for Scotland's Interpreters

Interpret Scotland

issue 15 | summer 2007

A' Foillseachadh naAlba



Who are we?

People, careers and training

Interpret Scotland

www.interpretscotland.org.uk

ISSN (print) 1740-1283

Produced by Interpret Scotland

Issue 15-: People, training and careers

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

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



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Design and layout: Design and Interpretative Services, Forestry Commission Scotland 0131 334 0303.

Printed by Allander 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.

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Wanted: courageous managers

Interpretation is a people business. Communication between two human beings is at its core, a sharing of enthusiasm or a point of view. All the other functions that get loaded onto interpretation, such as encouraging people to behave in a particular way, or meeting management goals, are meaningless without this essential quality.

So with this issue we have looked at the people who work in interpretation in Scotland, and how they got there. Perhaps the most striking thing about the five profiles in the magazine is just what a motley crew they make: they started out as carpenters or zoologists, project managers or art history students. As Bob Jones argues on page 3, interpretation needs this range of background experience: to see it as a profession that can be taught as a stand-alone qualification is to miss the point.

Of course interpreters do need training. But how far can training go in delivering a set of skills before it must turn to developing what Susan Cross (page 5) calls 'creative courage'? Another, perhaps more fundamental, question is whether training is reaching the people who need it. A range of courses now caters for people working in direct contact with the public as guides, or coordinating projects as interpretation officers. What is lacking is an awareness of what interpretation means among designers and, crucially, among senior managers. They are the ones who really need to understand the role of creative courage as well as management goals. They also need to appreciate, as Graham Black argues on page 9, how all their staff can play a part in the people business.

James Carter, editor

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 or sandra.phipps@snh.gov.uk You could also visit the Interpret Scotland web site: www.interpretscotland.org.uk

Next edition

Issue 16 of Interpret Scotland will coincide with The Vital Spark, the international conference being run by Interpret Scotland and the Association for Heritage Interpretation in Aviemore, 30 September to 3 October 2007. The magazine will showcase pioneering projects, and look at uniquely Scottish aspects of interpretation. For details about the conference visit www.thevitalspark2007.org.uk

Count your cherry stones



Bob Jones considers career options after dinner.

Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man, poor man, beggar-man... interpreter?

Here's the thing... you can't train an interpreter, but you can train all of the above (and lots more!) to be an interpreter. Discuss.

Perhaps the rhyme should still end with 'thief' – but of the Robin Hood variety! The 'interpreter' relies on knowledge acquired and understood on a particular subject in order to pass it on to others – to 'explain the meaning of things/places/events/processes/ideas'. Perhaps we are all 'thieves' to an extent in that we stand on the shoulders of others. We depend on knowledge, often hard won, built and passed on to us by those who have gone before... but not always acknowledged.

And here's another thing... Interpretation is not a profession; rather, it is a calling, a passion, even an art (in the fullest sense of that word). And the absolute worst thing that could befall the art of interpretation is that it become elitist, a chartered body, a 'club' for the few; a cloistered coven where you are a **Professional** because a degree and a piece of paper says so.

The next worst thing would be for interpretation to be hi-jacked by academia and taught to school-leavers and other innocents as a career. The good interpreter must have a first discipline, a base-line, some 'life experience'. Without such attributes he/she cannot possibly relate to the audience, cannot place things into context, cannot 'explain the meaning of things'. Interpreters are not teachers – but teachers can be interpreters. Interpreters can be chefs or engineers, writers or miners, astronomers or shepherds, nurses or cleansing operatives, playgroup assistants or parents. Whatever they are, whatever their background, the common denominator is that they will have one – a background that is!

My premise is that you can't make an interpreter out of an empty vessel. There must be something to build upon – and in the world of interpretation that 'something' should be built upon knowledge and passion; knowledge that grows out of a deep commitment to a particular field or subject, passion that emanates from deep understanding. It follows that the good interpreter will have a background in a first subject, will have experienced the world from another perspective before coming to the field of interpretation.

Through such 'life experiences' they can then have the audacity to place meaning into context for others.

It is salutary to look back at the inauguration of the Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage (SIBH) way back in 1975 – now the Association for Heritage Interpretation (AHI). The initial membership of around 108 enlightened souls represented some 20 different 'professions', ranging from architects to audio engineers, teachers to tour guides, environmentalists to educational psychologists, curators to conservationists, foresters to... You get the picture: diversity. Oh, and there was also a Lord and a Countess!

I am confident that if you looked closely at AHI today there would be much the same rich diversity of backgrounds. That is the beating heart of interpretation – the variety, the diversity of its proponents and practitioners. The more we try to put interpretation into a box, to 'certify' it, to decorate it with honours, to endorse it with certificates, the more we will strip it of its very strength, like Samson shorn.

In the late 1990s there was a move to establish a degree course in interpretation. I argued against such a path. In a round-about way those discussions have led to the University of the Highlands and Islands Master's degree in Interpretation, now run out of Perth College. I welcome and support this course, as it is at Masters' level, a second degree, so those who take it on come to it with a wealth of life-experience already (many could be teaching the course rather than studying it!). But it is still necessary to beware the fast-track to box ticking, the 'soft' degree, the gathering of 'letters' for their own sake.

By all means be professional – in fact it is required. But don't turn interpretation into a profession for self-aggrandisement and personal gain.

Bob Jones is Head of Design & Interpretation at Forestry Commission Scotland bob.jones@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Creative minds have always been known to survive any kind of bad training.

Anna Freud, psychoanalyst

Profiles



Viola Lier

Freelance tourist guide and trainer

How did you get into working in interpretation?

I'm not entirely sure! I grew up in East Germany, and some say you had to be good at interpretation to make new sense of the world almost overnight when the Berlin Wall came down. I suppose I got where I am now by chance, and by following my interests and instincts. After years of project management on capacity building projects in Central Europe I sought inspiration from Scottish History evening classes. Our lecturer breathed life into the facts, and I got to experience my first real live interpreter. The course led on to a Blue Badge Tourist Guide qualification – a risky career move at the age of 32! Soon I discovered that this was the type of interpretation for me. It's the most creative medium I've come across: working with people, experiencing places and exploring stories, whilst being your own boss.

What has been a formative or inspiring experience in your career?

The Blue Badge Tourist Guide training has been one of the most formative experiences, and I find every question from visitors inspiring. If I had to pick a specific moment or person, I'd nominate a self-appointed guide I met in Turkey. She noticed we were looking for some ancient rock tombs, tied her goat to a tree, and led us off with a smile through back yards and along tiny passages. Without much English she managed to convey a sense of ancient times and shape our understanding of the tombs. I was tempted to hand over my Blue Badge to her there and then.

What frustrates you about the field?

Being asked, 'So what's your real job?' Understandable perhaps: I'm visibly enjoying myself when I work. I would wish that the contribution interpreters make to communities, society, conservation, the economy and, dare I say, to shaping the future, is recognised more.

What advice would you give to someone interested in interpretation as a career?

Being a live interpreter is what you are, not what you do. You must love your subject. You must be easily inspired and motivated. You must also love working with people, be patient, open minded, caring. You won't get rich as a tourist guide, but it can be extremely fulfilling and creative.

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Jim Gillies

Recreation manager for Forestry Commission Scotland's Inverness Forest District (South)

How did you get into working in interpretation?

I've been involved in 'Interpretation' for over 40 years... though not always aware of it! It started when I left school at fifteen and got a job constructing displays for advertising campaigns with Scope Publicity Studios in Glasgow.

Having a passion for Scottish hills and wildlife, most weekends saw me hitching north. That's when I realised I would prefer to live and work in the countryside, so I left Scope and took a ghillie's job at Loch Assynt. 25 years later, I was still doing the same job, albeit as head stalker for Lord Seafield.

But days on the hill weren't all about shooting – we'd often have long conversations about wildlife and Scottish culture. Guests ranged from Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the ex-president of France, to Bryan Ferry, so we had some very interesting discussions! All interpretation surely, and at its best... face to face.

What has been a formative or inspiring experience in your career?

After my time as a ghillie I started working at Rothiemurchus Estate: at that time they were leaders in interpretation. I spent three fruitful years taking the general public, school and college groups out ... all in all a tremendous training ground.

Fifteen years ago I was lucky enough to obtain the position of recreation ranger with the Forestry Commission based at Glenmore, now in the heart of the Cairngorms National Park. All the artistic, practical and interpersonal skills I've gained over 40 odd years have been put to good use here. As part of the 'design team' I've helped to shape the Visitor Centre interpretation, shying away from 'corporate panels' and 'mission statements'.

Now nearing retirement, are you going to stop interpreting?

Surely that would be the same as saying I'm going to stop talking!

What advice would you give someone starting on a career in interpretation?

Study hard, find some form of practical work and worthwhile hobbies to liven up your C.V.... and you'll get there in the end!

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You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him discover it in himself.

Galileo Galilei

Pushing the limits?

Susan Cross reflects on training interpreters

'Interpretation is an art... Any art is in some degree teachable.'

Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting our heritage*

Over the last twenty years I have spent a considerable amount of time training interpreters. I deliver training on writing for interpretation, evaluating interpretation, interpretive planning, and working with designers. My aim in all of this, like a lot of interpreters' efforts, is shamelessly idealistic and hopelessly unrealistic. I want to equip people to inspire and delight their public. I want to unleash their passion for the beautiful fragility of the natural world or the magnificent emotional saga of human history and turn them into charismatic, skilled, and imaginative communicators.

Do I succeed? To a certain extent. After years of practice, review and determined effort to pass on interpretive skills I recognise that there are limitations on what training can achieve.

To start with, some aspects of interpretation are simply more teachable than others. There are processes and understanding that underpin interpretive practice and lead to better interpretive solutions. If we want to maintain and raise professional standards, we must deliver training in those. Interpreters need to understand (among other things) how people learn; what motivates leisure visits to countryside and heritage sites; how to recognise a good story and sum up a good message; how to use a range of evaluation techniques; how to think strategically and how to write a good interpretive plan.

But they need other stuff too; stuff that is harder to teach and can perhaps only be encouraged. The best interpreters, the sort I would like us all to be, don't simply follow the guidelines, they also have what I call 'creative courage', often linked to a sense of adventure and a spirit of fun. They love the places or objects they work with and they love people. They are artists and, like other artists, they work with the tools and techniques someone like me can teach them but they do it in their own way, adding their own inspiration and flair.

People on my courses often ask how they can inspire their visitors. After years of experience, all I can say to them is, be as conscious and open as you can about what inspires you. And this cannot be taught. People do it in a range of ways from the big and brash to the small and quiet. It seems, so long as they do it with integrity, that it works. Poet John Moat said, 'the quality of the writing depends on the quality of the life'. I think it is similar with interpretation: the quality of the interpretation depends on the



A guide at le Nombriil du Monde, a French visitor attraction about the power of stories – and creative courage

quality of the love. I can teach tools and techniques and knowledge but I can't teach love.

That, of course, doesn't stop me trying to prod it into life. So on my training courses I advocate inventiveness, creativity, doing what feels right and being inspired. People regularly leave with more than tools and techniques; some also have exciting new ideas, a gleam in their eye and a spring in their step.

Back they go, these people with the potential to be good interpreters, many of them heading for disappointment, frustration and the second great limitation of interpretation training. They return to their organisations equipped with new understanding, determined to make a difference. But their organisations, it seems, are often not receptive to this enthusiasm. I regularly hear of bosses who will not believe that 150 well chosen words on a panel are better than 450 words from the management plan, or that it is worth paying for bespoke illustrations, or that a high quality installation will convey a sense of place.

All training can do is give people skills and knowledge. Good interpreters add a spark of creativity and have the potential to do great work. They need encouragement and support to nurture that potential and until we start equipping managers to play their part some of our training effort will be wasted. As a trainer, I am frustrated that I do not reach the right people. I rarely see the people who manage interpreters, and who therefore control the quality and effectiveness of interpretation. The next challenge for interpretive training is clear.

Susan Cross is a partner in Telltale, an interpretation consultancy based in Buxton. susan@telltale.co.uk

'We live in the age of the overworked, and the under-educated; the age in which people are so industrious that they become absolutely stupid.'

Oscar Wilde

Profiles



Caroline Tempest
Senior Interpretive Planner,
The National Trust for Scotland
(Central Office), Edinburgh

How did you get into working in interpretation?

From an early age I knew I wanted to work in the heritage sector. I worked at the Brontë Parsonage in Haworth whilst still at school, had a work placement with the National Trust for Scotland during my History of Art degree, and then a residential placement with the curatorial team at Chatsworth, Derbyshire. All this was very interesting but I knew I wanted to be more connected with the visiting public. So I studied for an MA in Heritage Interpretation, supporting myself with a great job as an Education Guide at the Royal Observatory, Edinburgh. Just as I was writing my thesis a post as Assistant Interpretive Planner came up at the NTS. That was seven years ago when the NTS was a very different place – and interpretation was only partly recognised as an integral part of heritage management.

What has been a formative or inspiring experience in your career?

Writing and implementing the first Interpretive Plan for Newhailes (then a new acquisition for the NTS) and on the back of it securing the first ever property based NTS Interpretation Officer. When Newhailes opened to the public it was awarded five stars from Visit Scotland – the first NTS property to achieve this. It's nice to get recognition for what can often be a tough job, but the best part is getting feedback from visitors and knowing you have made a difference to their visit.

What frustrates you about the field?

Interpretation as a profession has developed significantly and is now much more recognised – but too few design agencies are picking up this trend. Often I visit sites that look great aesthetically, but don't deliver on the interpretive messages.

What advice would you give to someone interested in interpretation as a career?

Try to get experience of working on a small interpretive project – most agencies are understaffed and would be more than willing to let a promising volunteer alleviate some of the workload. Practical experience really counts when applying for jobs as you need to be able to hit the ground running.

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Gordon MacLellan
Creeping Toad

As Creeping Toad, I work with groups to find ways of celebrating the places where people live, work and play. I work all over the UK and abroad, with projects from Devon to Forres and over to South Africa.

How did you get into working in interpretation?

My background is in science: I trained as a zoologist, specialising in Terrestrial Ecology at Glasgow University. After a few years teaching science at secondary level I escaped into full time environmental education and interpretation. I went freelance 12 years ago, moving from an environment/heritage education post into art and celebration-based interpretation. That's where I communicate best with people: in a space that combines environmental exploration and discovery with personal reflection and creativity and communal events.

Can you think of a formative or inspiring experience in your career?

My underlying inspirations lie in the world around me: just being in a place will fire my passion and commitment and suggest activities to use and paths to follow.

What frustrates you about the field?

People get so hooked on 'knowing' and 'instructing' that inspiration and emotion get lost. We can win the arguments about why we should save/protect/conservate but I don't think major change will come until we engage hearts and emotional commitment among the public. The most powerful interpretation takes risks. We can offer people information and the skills to find more for themselves, and then the courage to think, feel and decide for themselves. Those decisions might not be the ones we hope for, but for me that's the path we should pursue.

What advice would you give someone starting on a career in interpretation?

Gather experience; get mud, paint, glue and slug-slime on your hands. Follow your passion: communicate from both heart and head.

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Character, like a photograph, develops in darkness.

Yousuf Karsh, portrait photographer



Michael Hamish Glen

Freelance consultant

I've been involved in communication since, aged 3, I tried out a typewriter. After skirmishing with a range of jobs, I became Edinburgh's assistant publicity officer 40 years ago at the unseemly age of 25. After four years as the Scottish Tourist Board's (STB) Information Manager, I took on the 50-strong information department of the British Tourist Authority (BTA) in London. Five sybaritic years with an industrial training board were followed by three surreal ones with the Countryside Commission in Cheltenham before I set up Western Approaches to do PR, graphics and, I hoped, interpretation. What took me so long?

How did you get into working in interpretation?

While at STB I'd been sent on a week's course in interpretation, whatever that was, under the demanding but exciting tutelage of Don Aldridge, forever my mentor. I was on the road to Damascus but without a map. While at BTA, I was dragooned into helping form the Society for the Interpretation of Britain's Heritage (AHI's predecessor). In 1986, Michael Quinion and I teamed up as Touchstone and eager clients insisted that I find my map. Now I have a business called QuiteWrite as well, producing 'prose and poetry for people at places'.

Can you think of a formative or inspiring experience in your career?

The Association for Heritage Interpretation was always important to me as a forum of like-minded people. I took on the part-time administration job in 2000 and this has kept me firmly in touch with other interpreters.

What frustrates you about the field?

Clients who insist on telling visitors what they want them to know and not what these visitors might want to find out, and clients who believe designers should have the last say – and often the first.

What advice would you give someone starting on a career in interpretation?

Be as interested and involved in as many different things as you can, keep finding out and keep explaining. Your path along the Damascus road may be slow, full of diversions, but stick to it and you'll get there!

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what's ^{up} elsewhere

Jaakko Suvantola, Professor in Leisure and Recreation Studies at the University of Joensuu, Finland.

The word 'interpretation' was completely missing in professionals' vocabulary here in Finland, and interpretation-related projects with which we have been involved showed the need for interpretation training.

Thus we ran a Finnish language course in interpretation. The course was completely online, since it would have been difficult to get working professionals to take days off for travel. Gianna Moscardo from James Cook University (Australia) gave an inspirational series of lectures (not in Finnish, though), along with a couple of Finnish specialists (Petri Raivo and Teppo Loikkanen). The meaning of having a good theme and the process of planning interpretation especially seemed to create great moments of discovery and even exhilaration for the participants.

Now we are exploring the possibility of conducting such a course internationally. From the interpretation perspective the challenge is to create a concise way of doing this that really offers professionals new tools to make their work better. There is also a pedagogical challenge: fostering discovery means presence. Will we be successful in creating an online presence that is involving enough?

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Collections for the future

The Scottish Museums Council has published a strategy to guide the development of the collections held by Scotland's museums. The strategy aims to:

- ◆ promote Scotland's diverse museum collections and their potential as community and cultural resources at local and national level
- ◆ support museum staff to develop and sustain collections confidently, openly and effectively
- ◆ encourage museums to provide increased and innovative opportunities for users to truly engage with collections

Museums are increasingly familiar with the need to consider issues of intellectual as well as physical access to the more than 12 million items they hold. Interpretive planning – understanding the audience, conveying clear messages and evaluating success – is becoming an established way to approach this.

You can get a copy of *A National Collections Development Strategy for Scotland's Museums* via www.scottishmuseums.org.uk or telephone Gillian Findlay, Collections Development Manager on 0131 550 4126.

Caught in a web



Rosalind Newlands considers whether web-based distance learning is the answer for interpretation training.

The University of Edinburgh has been working with the Scottish Tourist Guides Association to develop pioneering web-based learning for tourist guides, supplemented by practical training, tours and tutorials. This combined system is now being developed for use by others including Wild Scotland.

The advantages of web-based learning include accessibility for students who live at varying distances – we currently have students from Milan, Venice and Berlin. Students can link to approved sites and access a huge volume of information. However, this means that they must select carefully and receive on-line or direct tutor support, particularly as some don't have English as their mother tongue. Distance learning has limitations: you can learn

history – but to understand geology, natural heritage, archaeology or architecture you also need to go and look!

This emphasis on field experience is supported by the experts: the guides themselves. In a survey by the Federation of European Guides about what should be included in tourist guide training programmes, guides emphasised the importance of practical training, whether or not it currently happens in their own countries.

A European standard for training and qualification for tourist guides (including wildlife guides) that is being developed reflects this too, requiring a 60/40 split in knowledge and practical training.

We can learn about the environment and interpretation theory through distance learning but we need to go and see before we can understand and explain to others. Interpretation is a hands-on profession. Use distance learning for facts and research; then get your students out and about. Teach them on site; show them best practice and let them try it out for themselves.

Rosalind Newlands is President of the World Federation of Tourist Guides Associations (WFTGA) and Training Manager for the Scottish Tourist Guides Association rosnewlands@osa.sol.co.uk

Obituary – Fiona Price



Fiona Price, a freelance interpretation consultant and copywriter, died in December 2006 following an illness fought with characteristic bravery and dignity. Fiona was an inspirational life force who enriched everyone she encountered with her vast 'joie de vivre'. Those who knew her are deeply shocked and saddened by her untimely death and our thoughts are with her family as they face the future without her.

Fiona was a talented writer, interpreter and creative consultant with vast knowledge covering many subjects. She was passionate about Scotland's rich cultural and natural heritage and eager to share her extensive knowledge and enthusiasm through her work in the field of interpretation.

Her varied career included television production and publishing before working for eight years as publications officer at Scottish Natural Heritage. She started freelance work in 2001.

Fiona was the creative force responsible for the success of several high profile projects for Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. She created the content and layout for 150 interpretive panels and plinths that you can find in diverse locations throughout the Park, meeting ambitious deadlines. She was also the interpretive master planner and visionary responsible for the content of two experimental and interactive interpretive journey guides, which offer the same journey to visitors in three different media (traditional booklet, audio guide or audio-visual handset). This project was piloted in the summer before Fiona died and we were able to relay to her praise from visitors who experienced her work.

Her many excellent achievements in the field of interpretation convey the great unfulfilled potential of her passing. She will be sadly missed by everyone who worked with her.

**Lynda Fraser,
Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park**

The Lord prefers common-looking people. That is why
He made so many of them.
Abraham Lincoln



Beyond information

Graham Black wonders just how far museums have gone in embracing interpretation as a discipline.

It is an exciting time to practise interpretation in museums. Over the last ten years in particular an increasingly audience-centred focus has replaced the traditional 'fetishing' of collections. Today, core agendas for museums focus on visitor access (including intellectual access), broadening the nature of museum audiences and enhancing the learning that takes place in museums. These agendas in turn have led to an increased awareness of differing audience needs and learning styles. As a result there has been a gradual move away from the concept of museum display as a vehicle for the mass communication of information towards one which seeks to enable visitors to create their own personalised experiences. At the heart of this remains the desire by museums to focus on the 'real thing' (including oral history, archive photographs and so on, as well as objects).

This should strike a chord with interpreters, and interpretation is a word now in widespread use both within the museums profession and by those working in the field of museum display. And yet... I have serious doubts about whether many museums really understand the term. While curators are redefining their role as interpreters of their collections and what we used to call education officers are being given new titles as interpretation and learning officers, the focus is still too often on the structured transmission of information rather than on enabling visitors to make connections and engage in their own meaning-making. Yes, museums are looking at new ways to convey information to meet the needs of different learning styles, but this tends to mean looking at the display media used rather than supporting the active involvement of audiences with relevant, revealing and provocative display content.

Closer attention to planning, exhibition structure and a wider palette of interpretive media has led to increasing use by museums of interpretive masterplanning in design briefs and HLF bids. This can be more complex than for natural heritage and historic site management, involving close collaboration between museum curators, learning and access staff, interpretation and audience consultants, designers and architects. It requires detailed audience evaluations and the development of statements of significance to define potential stories that will form the basis for gallery themes. Museum courses are increasingly including training in the

development of interpretation plans as part of their core provision. Regional agencies are also now offering similar workshops as part of on-going career development.

I explored this topic in my book, *The Engaging Museum*. However, since writing it, I have had a 'road to Damascus' moment. By far the more important issue is the attitude of senior museum staff. The creation of display content is still seen by most curators and museum directors as the end of a process, rather than the setting of a framework for on-going visitor engagement with collections and associated ideas.

What really matters – and where interpretation could make a huge difference very cheaply – is the day-to-day experiences of museum visitors up and down the country, and the extent to which they are supported in their engagement. Why do museum managers perpetuate the ludicrous notion that museum attendants are there primarily for security? Why do they not see that the visitor experience would benefit exponentially if the attendant role was replaced by the museum equivalent of national park rangers trained in interpretation?

Good work *is* being done – many museums have programmes of activities and events, usually developed by the learning officers. But these tend to be produced in isolation rather than as part of a holistic approach to interpretive provision which ensures there is always something new happening, and which caters for a wide range of audiences. This comes back to a failure to understand what interpretation is, to a lack of appropriate jobs and influence, and to a lack of training within museum courses. Change will only come, not through the training of new recruits to the profession, but through convincing museum directors of the huge benefits a trained interpreter could bring and the very limited costs involved.

Meanwhile all my students are now being trained in basic interpretive techniques and their potential for application within a museum environment (and for encouraging visitors to explore beyond the museum walls).

Graham Black teaches on the Museums and Heritage Management course at Nottingham Trent University and works as an interpretive consultant on museum projects. His book *The Engaging Museum* is published by Routledge. graham.black@ntu.ac.uk

At the Scottish Mining Museum, Newtongrange, ex-Miners work as guides to bring the collection alive.

Let's all share

Julie Forrest describes the long running training programme supported by Scottish Natural Heritage.

Many of you will have attended or at least heard about Scottish Natural Heritage's *Sharing Good Practice* programme.

What you may not know is that the programme began way back in 1993 under the banner of *Getting to Grips with Learning*. Each year international speakers like Joseph Cornell, Steve Van Matre and John Veverka, together with a range of home grown talent, including Gordon MacLellan and James Carter, were given a platform to inspire and enthuse a new generation of interpreters and environmental educators.

The interpretation training events initially focussed on getting the basics right – planning, writing and media selection – and were targeted at both SNH staff and individuals from partner agencies. The simple aim was to get more people interested in interpretation and help them to feel more confident about what interpretation was and how to use this communication tool effectively.

Topics included Tackling Vandalism, Visitor Management Planning, Environmental Art, New Technology, Exhibition Design, Visitor Centres and Visitor Attractions, to name just a few.



Moving away from training

By the late 1990s, under the title of *Sharing Good Practice* (SGP), the focus of events shifted away from the role of the recognised expert in favour of bringing together a group of practitioners with varying levels of experience to share ideas and approaches on a topic relevant to their work. These events feature case studies and the learning is enhanced by the use of a wide range of resource materials.

The SGP approach is now used on a much wider range of subjects and issues, for example, Working With Rivers, Renewable Energy, Biodiversity at the Chalk Face. Wherever possible interpretation techniques are integrated into the development and delivery of these events or materials so helping to improve awareness of what interpretation has to offer to different audiences.

Maintaining Momentum

With the formation of *Interpret Scotland* in 1998, the planning and organising of interpretation events within the SGP programme became a more collaborative process, reflecting our collective view on what issues required attention. In my opinion the future needs of a new generation of interpreters rely on Interpret Scotland members continuing to work together to provide high quality workshops that encourage participation and the sharing of good ideas.



Lorna Brown has been at the helm of SNH's SGP programme from the outset. Lorna has been a consistent and enthusiastic ambassador for promoting the use of interpretation to a wide range of audiences; she was also responsible for overseeing the production of the IS journal for many years. Lorna retires in May, and we would like to say a big 'thank you' from Interpret Scotland for all the hard work she has done behind the scenes. Best wishes for your retirement!

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What do you want to say and why?

The third in the series of Interpret Scotland guides to interpretation.

Mary Hudson looks at interpretive planning.

Planning interpretation means thinking carefully about what you want to tell people and why. It also leads you to ask a whole range of questions about who your visitors are, what is significant about your place and why you feel it is important to interpret it. Asking these questions before a project starts helps to focus the interpretation and means you will be able to measure its success.

Interpretive Plans can vary in length and format depending upon the nature of the site and the objective of the plan. Asking yourself why the plan is necessary will help to determine what format the plan should take. Is it required as part of a funding application? Is it a chance to get all the people involved with a particular site or project together and record their thoughts and ideas? Or is it simply a way of focussing the interpretation – making sure the aims, objectives and storylines are identified and adhered to?

Writing interpretive plans

There are a number of books and guidelines (see below) that provide detailed advice on how to write an interpretive plan. In the meantime, the following list may help to get you started.

1. Interpretive aims and objectives

Why do you want to communicate with visitors? (increasing understanding/managing visitors/managing a site/improving the economy etc.)

2. Who are your visitors? (characteristics/numbers/interests and expectations/length of stay) See *Issue 13* for more detailed guidelines.

3. What is your place like and what does it have to offer? (features visitors can see/unique stories the place has to tell/what is significant)

4. What else is happening around? (both within and without the site – what already exists in local area/what is already interpreted within the site)

5. What do you want to say about your place? Identify themes.

6. How, and where, you are going to say it? (choice of media/location and timing of media/allocation of different themes to different places)

7. Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate! See *Issue 14* for more detailed guidelines.

What do you want to say?

One of the most important steps in interpretive planning is to decide upon a theme – or what you want your interpretation to say. Ideally, a theme should take the form of a complete sentence, or sentences, and should represent the main thing, or things, that the visitor should have learnt before leaving the place. A number of themes may be identified to allow for a number of subjects to be covered but it is important not to have too many so your visitors don't get overloaded!

It is always helpful to ask yourself:

- What do I want people to *know* as a result of the interpretation?
- What do I want people to *feel* as a result of the interpretation?
- What do I want people to *do* as a result of the interpretation?

These questions should help you develop sound interpretive themes.

For more on interpretive planning, try these resources:

SNH guidelines on interpretive planning
www.snh.org.uk/www/Interpretation/default.html

SMC factsheet and guidance on how to write an interpretive plan
www.scottishmuseums.org.uk

A sense of place – an interpretive planning handbook, ed. James Carter (1997) Available for download from the Scottish Interpretation Network (SIN) website
www.scotinterpnet.org.uk

Interpretive planning: the 5-M model for successful planning projects Lisa Brochu (2003) InterpPress, Fort Collins, Colorado

Environmental interpretation: a practical guide for people with big ideas and small budgets Sam Ham (1992) North America Press ISBN 1 555919022

Interpretive master planning John Veverka (1994) Falcon Press ISBN 1560442743

I said, 'That was a very brave thing to do.' He said, 'Och, it was just the training.' I have a feeling that, in the end, probably that is the answer to a great many things.

Queen Elizabeth II

Guiding on the waves

Deborah Benham tackles the special needs of interpreters on boats.



Marine guides need creative solutions if the stars of the show don't turn up

It's July 2004 and I'm working on my PhD, studying sea otters in California. A friend who runs a local whale watching operation is short of guides and asks if I'll help out. 'Great!' I think, 'free whale watching trips – what could be better?' But hang on a second... I've got to do the guiding... that's actually pretty scary.

When I arrive at the dock it's heaving with expectant people, talking, laughing and peering excitedly over the railing at the sealions circling beneath. There are families with young children, couples, elderly people and enthusiasts with expensive binoculars and cameras. We board and the questions start 'Will we get sick?' 'Where are the toilets?' 'How long until we see the whales?' My stomach tightens as I realise I have to look after these people and keep them entertained for five hours. 'What if we don't even find the whales?', I panic, 'do I have enough to say to keep them all happy? What if the weather gets bad and they're all miserable?' I'm feeling out of my depth already, unsure of what is expected of me or how to address everyone's needs and not wanting to look foolish in front of the skipper. 'God, I wish there'd been some training available' I think to myself as I launch into my ill-prepared commentary.

Like many people who work as marine guides, my background is in science. Initially I had few of the skills needed to interpret the marine environment to a group of holiday makers. My experiences, and those of many others, highlight the need for structured training for marine interpreters. Working in an environment where the main attractions may or may not turn up is challenging. Dealing with people who may be scared, sick, cold or wet is challenging. Trying to inspire people about conservation issues and environmental responsibility is challenging.

But these are situations that regularly face marine guides.

Recognising this, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) is currently developing training for marine guides. The Society is committed to supporting the development of a sustainable, educational whale watching industry which has real conservation benefits. Helping guides to become a more professional and empowered community will lead to higher quality environmental interpretation during whale watching experiences, and hence increase their conservation value. A dedicated naturalist or guide on board can also conduct research and ensure that visitors and boat skippers behave responsibly around the wildlife.

Over the last year I've been investigating what training currently exists for interpreters, tourist guides and specifically, marine interpreters. Although there are plenty of excellent courses available that offer interpretation and guiding skills, there doesn't seem to be much provision for training marine interpreters. What does exist seems mostly to be offered by tour operators and only available to their staff. WDCS plan to develop a course for people interested in becoming a marine guide, or those wishing to improve their existing skills, so they can become accredited and recognised as high quality marine interpreters.

The initial development of this scheme is taking place in Scotland, where WDCS have a wildlife centre on the Moray Firth employing several volunteers who work as interpreters on shore and on local dolphin watching boats. This pilot scheme is being run in close association with local interpretation experts and tourism training providers to ensure that the course we develop is to a high standard and is recognised by existing training and accreditation bodies. In the years to come we hope to develop the programme further, making it available through our WDCS offices around the world.

When asked why she got into environmental education and interpretation, a colleague of mine replied, 'Most of us just start out passionate about the cause, then we want to share that passion with other people.' That passion is a common theme in WDCS, and through developing better training for marine guides we hope to be better able to share our passion with the rest of the world.

Dr Deborah Benham is the Project Officer for the Dolphin Space Programme (www.dolphinspace.org), a training and accreditation scheme for wildlife tour boats in the Moray Firth, Scotland. deborah.benham@wdcs.org For more information on WDCS please see www.wdcs.org