



Grandmother's footsteps



The new romantics



Edinburgh takes on the world



A museum in the park

the journal for Scotland's Interpreters

Interpret Scotland

issue 17 | spring 2008

A' Foillseachadh na h-Alba



The
people's
treasures

Interpret Scotland

www.interpretscotland.org.uk

ISSN (print) 1740-1283

Produced by Interpret Scotland

Issue 17-: The people's treasures

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

Think like a wise man but communicate
in the language of the people

William Butler Yeats

The Interpret Scotland steering group:

Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions, Eva McDiarmid 01786 475152, eva@asva.co.uk
Cairngorms National Park Authority, Andy Ford 01479 870558, andyford@cairngorms.co.uk
Council for Scottish Archaeology, Helen Bradley 0131 668 4189, h.bradley@scottisharchaeology.org.uk
Forestry Commission Scotland, Paul Hibberd 01463 232811, paul.hibberd@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
Highlands and Islands Enterprise, (to be confirmed) 01463 244267
Historic Scotland, Sheena Garden 0131 668 8979, sheena.garden@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
Museums Galleries Scotland, Helena Gillis 0131 476 8458, helenag@museums galleries scotland.org.uk
National Archive of Scotland, Tristram Clarke 0131 535 1314, tristram.clarke@nas.gov.uk
National Galleries of Scotland, Marie-Louise Smoor 0131 624 6410, msmoor@nationalgalleries.org
National Museums of Scotland, Claire Allan 0131 247 4194, c.allan@nms.ac.uk
The National Trust for Scotland, Caroline Tempest 0131 243 9359, ctempest@nts.org.uk
Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Ian Edwards 0131 248 2979, i.edwards@rbge.org.uk
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Karl Stevens 0131 311 6500, karl.stevens@rspb.org.uk
Scottish Enterprise, Katrina Morrison 0141 228 2126, katrina.morrison@scotnet.co.uk
Scottish Natural Heritage, Julie Forrest (IS Chair) 01738 458535, julie.forrest@snh.gov.uk
Scottish Tourist Guides Association, Viola Lier 0141 334 3170, viola@ravingscotland.co.uk
Scottish Wildlife Trust, (to be confirmed) 01786 849 157
Visit Scotland, Heather Akroyd 0131 472 2282, heather.akroyd@visitscotland.com
Other organisations with a national remit relevant to interpretation are welcome to join.
Editor: Sue Walker, sue@fishwater.freeserve.co.uk
Editorial team: Sue Atkinson, SNH; Helena Gillis, MGS; Viola Lier, STGA; Eva McDiarmid, ASVA; Kit Reid, HS, Andy Ford, CNPA.

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.

Contents

The new romantics	3
Weaving cultural heritage into a National Park's interpretation	
Interpretation for a remote archipelago	4
How can we interpret remote sites for everyone	
Edinburgh takes on the world	5
How World Heritage status works for our capital	
Grandmother's footsteps	6
What can our oldest and youngest national parks learn from each other?	
What's up elsewhere	8
Benign scavenging for good ideas	
News	9
The Vital Spark; National Treasures; New IS Chair	
A museum in the park	10
Working within the National Park	
The art of communication	11
Selecting interpretive media	
The Adopt-a-monument scheme	12
Local communities take on their heritage	

The people's treasures

Sharp-eyed readers will notice that in this issue we have broadened our advertised theme of National Parks to include the built heritage and collections in museums and galleries. In doing so we have tried to capture new ideas for protecting and promoting our national treasures. An exciting theme has emerged – how much our approach to this precious heritage has changed over the last fifty years. In the past it often seemed as if our national treasures were being protected from the public – access to land was often limited; museums and art galleries seemed dry, dusty places catering for a highly-educated few.

Now the barricades are down – we are here to help protect our heritage for the public, and most importantly, with the public. Communities are encouraged to get involved, take responsibility, and feel ownership, rather than stand by as spectators.

Interpretation is moving on from informing the public about the treasures on their doorstep, to helping communities to celebrate them in their own way. I say – 'let's party!'

Talk of moving on brings us to the news that Interpret Scotland members have reluctantly come to the decision that for financial reasons the next couple of issues will be electronic. But don't worry, you'll still be able to keep up to date with the Journal. It will also give us an exciting opportunity to have a think about what an electronic version should entail. See the box below for more details and have your say in our readers' survey – details on page 9.

Sue Walker, editor and freelance interpretation specialist
sue@fishwater.freeserve.co.uk

Interpret Scotland Journal goes electronic

The next issue of Interpret Scotland will not be available in a printed format. Instead we will be publishing it on-line on the IS website at www.interpretscotland.org.uk

If you would like to receive an e-mail alert linking to future journals please e-mail: karen.smith@snh.gov.uk

If you cannot receive copies electronically but still wish to read the journal please write to Karen at SNH, Battleby, Redgorton, Perth PH1 3EW. We may be able to send out some photocopied issues.

Art is born of the observation and investigation of nature
Cicero

The new romantics

Wavy wall at the National Park Gateway Centre



One of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park's stated aims is to celebrate the art and literature associated with the area. Here Tim Edwards, the park's Director, explains how this rich cultural heritage is woven into the Park's interpretation.

The National Park's outstanding landscapes, wildlife, cultural heritage and romantic image together offer the most enduring and sustainable interpretive asset of all. These qualities, with Loch Lomond at their centre, have drawn travellers for centuries and helped establish mass tourism here early in the Victorian era. They also stimulated the creation of romantic images in literature and art. Writers and artists such as Turner, Millais, the Wordsworths and Verne were drawn here, while Sir Walter Scott's 'Lady of the Lake' inspired millions to come and enjoy the sparkling lochs and rugged mountains.

The influx of visitors continues today, and an intrinsic part of the National Park's role is interpreting this romantic landscape. The legendary and historic characters and events that have inspired writers and artists make an important connection between place and people here. Who can deny the lure of Rob Roy, brought into modern focus by the cinema, or the romantic images embodied in the steam ships SS Walter Scott and SS Maid of the Loch. More contemporary connections such as 'Dr Finlay's Casebook' and 'Take the High Road' are still enjoyed by visitors in settings such as Luss village.

For the National Park Authority the starting point for reflecting this literary and artistic inheritance has been the creation of a series of landscape images which have embodied the uncluttered but striking style of early travel posters. These images are evolving into a brand that sets the tone and reflects the values of the park.

A collection of contemporary outdoor artwork, commissioned for the National Park Gateway Centre at Balloch, and the commissioning of a new music score to accompany visual images within the centre, show a commitment by the Authority to build on the area's cultural heritage. Poetry inscribed into our new wooden seating was inspired by the landscape and was written by modern Scottish interpreter Michael Glen.

Events such as 'Singing in the Park', where communities in the Park had a chance to experience this art form in the local village hall; or the classic car run from the old Argyll Motor Works to the 'Rest and be Thankful' hill pass, which offered the opportunity to experience the landscape from behind a pair of goggles and a flowing neckerchief, all make connections between people and the park. The coming 200th anniversary of the Lady of the Lake offers the Authority and its partners a platform for a range of celebrations of the romantic literature and art across the park.

Stimulating and supporting contemporary pieces and events helps create an evolution and continuity for art, literature and music in the park. This in turn provides stimulation for people to continue to make new connections with the place, ensuring the centuries-old romance endures for the future.

Tim Edwards
Director, Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park
www.lochlomond-trossachs.org



SS Sir Walter Scott on Loch Katrine



A selection from the National Park poster series

Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts

Albert Einstein

Interpretation In a remote archipelago

Very few people will ever get to visit St Kilda, yet it is a World Heritage site and seen by many as a national treasure. How can interpretation overcome this? Jill Harden of the National Trust for Scotland explains.

St Kilda is one of only 24 sites across the globe that is a dual World Heritage Site, recognised for both its natural and cultural heritage. This is an amazing accolade for a small archipelago that lies 100 miles west of mainland Britain and 45 miles west of the Western Isles – part of the Gaelic heartland. However, even in today's age of globalisation St Kilda is seen as remote, apart, on the edge of the world. Only 2–3,000 people manage to cross this stretch of the Atlantic each summer, a voyage that is often less than comfortable.

Before the evacuation of the population in 1930, those who wanted to find out more about St Kilda, but could not afford the journey to 'see' the islands, could only read books and articles, or study the range of postcards and photos taken by the privileged few. Since then more books have been published, more photos taken, research projects have been reported on and, occasionally, museum exhibitions organised to reflect a mediated understanding of St Kilda. Nowadays, the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) and others are attempting to address the need to share the archipelago with the many more people who want to experience St Kilda.

Virtual access offers such an opportunity to many people across the globe. Over the past seven years NTS has established two websites about the archipelago. One provides information about the islands in English or Gaelic, www.kilda.org.uk or www.hiort.org.uk. Written in the main by NTS staff, it reflects their intimate knowledge of the archipelago today, but perhaps offers all-too-brief information on a hugely diverse range of subjects – for

example a page on how people lived there a century ago, and a regular news page. It provides a useful indication of the demand for information on St Kilda, with well over 2,000 hits a week at the English and Gaelic sites. The site guestbook is well used and enables discussions that would otherwise be extremely difficult. However, if a web site is to be virtual then it needs to reflect continuing changes in understanding. I would like to see this site as a living entity with more regular updates and reversionings to reflect developing thoughts and new interpretations.

The other website – the Wee Kilda Guide – also in English or Gaelic, was created for kids, but you get the impression that numerous adults use it too – as indicated in the guestbook. The site answers some of the questions that P4–7 pupils in Benbecula asked, such as 'what did children wear?' and even 'where did they go to the toilet?' Quizzes are an integral part of the site, enabling us all to find out more. But to make this site worthwhile, sufficient resources will need to be found to get regular feedback from teachers and pupils, and to interact with them via the website and ensure the site grows – something which is not guaranteed at present.

Enabling people to experience a multi dimensional St Kilda from afar is obviously a challenge. How can those who do not physically visit the archipelago touch the place? Exhibitions of photos, artworks, 'museum' objects, sound and film, either individually or combined, have been organised over the past few years by various bodies based in the Western Isles and on the mainland. Some have given



St Kilda Village Bay from Mulloch Mor

information from the curator's or artist's perspective'. Others have enabled today's St Kildans to speak about their experiences and knowledge. Only 'Mac-talla nan Eun – The Echo of Birds; a European Opera of St Kilda', staged in the summer of 2007, has been solely in the medium of Gaelic, told from a Gael's perspective². It provided interpretations of the past, and it is hoped that the project will have an island legacy for the future. Presumably there will be other innovative approaches to interpreting St Kilda from a distance in the coming years.

In an increasingly challenging world we will all interpret a place quite differently, varying according to our upbringing, our understandings and our culture. Possibly all that this reinforces is that, whatever the interpretation, community involvement is needed to touch the present or remember a past, no matter how close or how far away.

Jill Harden, National Trust for Scotland

To find out more visit:

www.kilda.org.uk or www.hiort.org.uk

www.kilda.org.uk/weekildaguide or

www.hiort.org.uk/weekildaguide

¹www.cnesiar.gov.uk/museum/sgoil/previous.htm or www.claireharkess.com/st_kilda.htm

²www.stkilda.eu

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie.
William Shakespeare

Edinburgh takes on the world



A family enjoys Doors Open Day



Edinburgh - A World Heritage Site that's home to 20,000 people

David Hicks is the Communications Manager for the Edinburgh World Heritage Site. Here he explains how the designation helps interpret this historic city.

When the combined Old and New Towns of Edinburgh were inscribed by UNESCO on the World Heritage list in 1995, they joined places such as the Great Wall of China and the Pyramids of Giza as one of the world's most significant cultural locations. The inscription recognised the unique quality and contrast between the medieval Old Town, with its tall tenements and narrow closes, and the grand spacious squares and terraces of the Georgian New Town.

Edinburgh's World Heritage Site is relatively unusual in encompassing most of the city centre. It is home to around 20,000 people, a place of work for around 73,000, the second most popular tourist destination in the UK. The majority of the built heritage is also in private hands, which gives residents and property owners a very real stakehold in the site.

Edinburgh World Heritage (EWH) was formed in 1999 by the City of Edinburgh Council and Historic Scotland to monitor development, fund conservation work, and promote the site. The World Heritage Promotions Group (WHPG) co-ordinates the interpretation of the site. The city council, as the planning authority, looks to raise awareness and support for the conservation of the site; Historic Scotland has devolved responsibility for World Heritage; Visit Scotland views the built heritage as a vital asset in attracting tourists.

A good working partnership has also developed with Edinburgh City of Literature, a UNESCO designation awarded in 2004. Edinburgh's built and literary heritage have strong links, and these have been a

source of inspiration for writers from Robert Louis Stevenson to Ian Rankin. In 2007 EWH and Edinburgh City of Literature devised a Stevenson trail through the Old and New Towns, and plans are now underway to produce a series of audio downloads giving a tour of the World Heritage Site.

The value of World Heritage status in interpreting the city really lies in making these connections, and bringing organisations together. However an audit commissioned in 2006 shows that whilst there are a number of heritage attractions in the city centre, the interpretation available is usually specific to each site. This is where the World Heritage Site has a key role to play, and an interpretation strategy is now being prepared.

The strategy identifies that the World Heritage Emblem, which all sites are allowed to display, is a key tool. The Emblem acts as a quality mark, and there is wide scope to increase its use. This globally recognised branding can be used to bring a wide variety of projects under the World Heritage banner.

The established events programme will be expanded to target the local audience. World Heritage Day is celebrated around the world on 18 April, which provides a good focus for highlighting the international significance of the Old and New Towns. EWH also supports the Old Town Festival in collaboration with the Scottish Storytelling Centre. In 2007 the festival included a story tour of the closes and wynds of the Royal Mile in the company of Deacon Brodie, a respectable 18th century tradesman who led a double life as a daring thief. Doors Open Day too is an important part of the calendar, and for the last two years the programme has included a family trail of the World Heritage Site.

Calton Hill is perhaps the best location to understand the World Heritage Site, and an EWH funded project is currently underway to improve public access. Interpretation and viewpoint panels will be installed, highlighting the two contrasting sides of the city.

A recent survey showed that only 56% of residents and 41% of visitors were aware of Edinburgh's World Heritage status. When the survey is repeated in 2009 the results should be vastly improved. The key will be to demonstrate to everyone that Edinburgh's built heritage is not only beautiful but world-class.

**David Hicks, Communications Manager,
Edinburgh World Heritage Site**
www.ewht.org.uk



Edinburgh: World Heritage City

'If everyone is thinking alike, someone isn't thinking!
General George Patten



Grandmother's footsteps?



Andy Ford, Visitor Services Officer for the Cairngorms National Park Authority, one of the UK's newest National Parks, and Daniel Boys, Interpretation Officer for Peak Experience and Moor Care Project Officer for Moors for the Future, of the Peak District, Britain's oldest National Park, discuss what they can learn from each other.



AF: I think the main difference between the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) and other NPA's is that we don't really have any direct contact with visitors. We don't run any visitor centres or ranger services, don't lead any guided walks or events programmes, and produce relatively few publications. Our whole way of thinking is that the Cairngorms National Park (CNP), as a piece of ground, already has lots of visitor centres, rangers etc - they're just being run by lots of different organisations.

DB: We have a different approach at the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA). The first national park warden service was inaugurated on Good Friday 1954, outside a local pub in Edale from where volunteers would advise ramblers of walking routes. In that same decade the first official National Park centre was opened in Edale. Over time, further visitor centres have been built, ranger-led walks and events were introduced and now we've applied digital media to our portfolio: websites, downloadable pdf trails and MP3 audio trails.

Today, the PDNPA works in partnership with many public and private organisations, charities and community groups. We visit local schools and communities, provide volunteer opportunities from practical conservation to office-based work, and produce

newsletters and publications. A key element has been linking with businesses, for example providing free business listings in ten themed 'Peak Experience' guides which provide information on places to visit. We also run a number of 'local product' and 'green' accreditations.

AF: Yes, working with others is the crux of what we do. It's not the National Park Authority's National Park. We put a lot of effort into making the distinction between the National Park and the National Park Authority - to the point of sounding like a broken record! Local authorities, national agencies, private estates, visitor attractions and communities all make up the National Park; and, one way or another, they are all presenting the place to visitors. Together they make up something of national and international significance. We think there's value in recognising and representing themselves as part of a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts.

DB: Like you we have the organisations such as the National Trust, Wildlife Trusts and water companies who also operate visitor centres to one degree or another. Each organisation has its core aims, which it obviously needs to promote. I would say none of them has the same over-arching view of the 'Peak District'. While they are interested in what occurs outside of their boundaries their primary concerns are what happens within them (although I

think this is changing). So I think the PDNPA has the widest remit and tries to promote, discuss, facilitate, or interpret all of the issues that cover this vast area.

It comes down to resources. If the organisations I mention had more staff they might well be able to spread their wings more and look at all the issues in the Peak District holistically. But primarily they need to achieve their organisational goals first and foremost, and then tackle wider issues.

Here at the PDNPA I think we need more National Park Authority staff on the ground engaging with people. But economics govern the number of staff we can have and each year the Authority's budget gets tighter. To overcome this we have tried to implement innovative ways of engaging with the 10 million visitors we have by providing things like audio trails that can be accessed via the internet. We have used oral history for some of the audio trails - stories from people in the community, to give an insight into life in the Park. As you say, they are the National Park.



You can find more information at:
www.cairngorms.co.uk
www.peak-experience.org.uk
www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk
www.peakdistrict.org

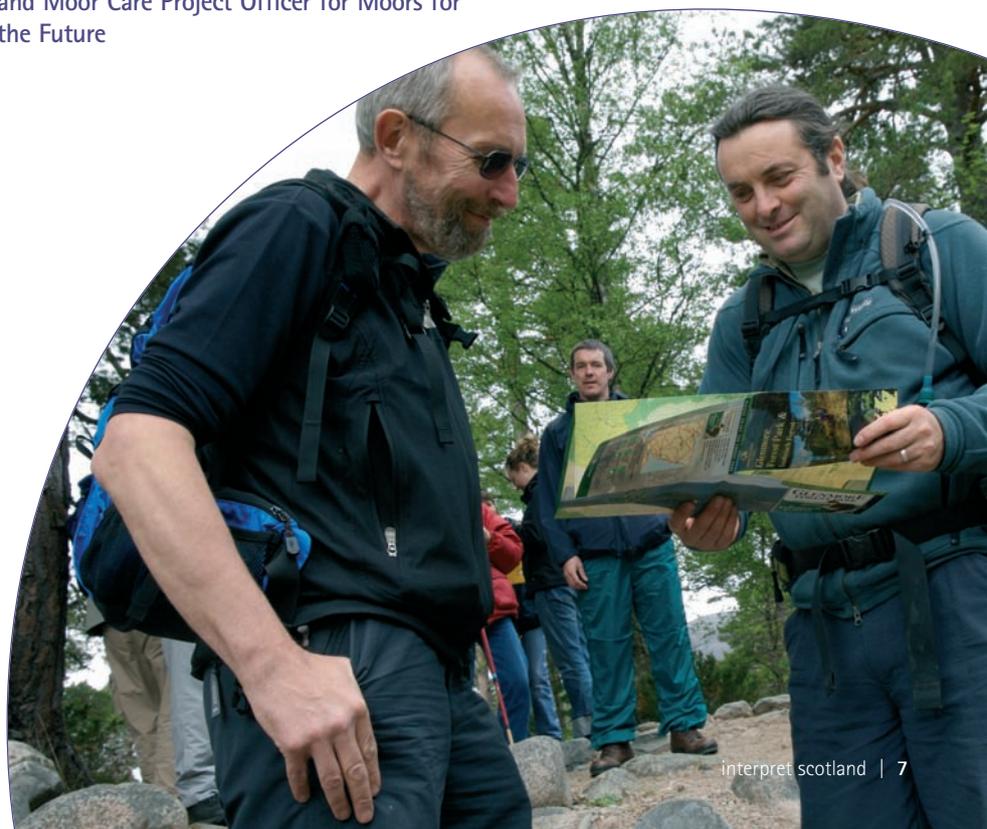
AF: CNPA doesn't have its own ranger service, but the National Park has plenty of rangers. And we don't think this approach to representing the Park as well as the local piece of ground they work on necessarily means extra work. It's all about the presentation. By choosing slightly different information and presenting it in a slightly different way, what rangers are currently doing can help build up a picture of the Park in a visitor's mind. Putting what is already happening in the context of the National Park, hefting these stories to the area, will help visitors get a real sense of place and appreciate what makes CNP special. I think it's a bit like linking your local event to a wider week-long celebration in the area – just a bit bigger and for a bit longer!

We are producing a guidance document that aims to capture what makes CNP what it is in themes and stories. We hope it will inspire others to see themselves as part of the National Park picture, and so help visitors to see it too. It's still in development now, so whether or not it can be achieved remains to be seen. But the point is, if it is achieved it will be down to the people and places that make up the National Park, not the Park Authority.

Well, while we have very similar goals, our approaches are very different – but that's probably because we started from very different places. In the 1950s when the Peak District National Park was set up promoting public access to the countryside was in its infancy, and there were very few facilities to help people get the most of their visits to the Park. By the time the Cairngorms National Park was born a wide range of visitor facilities was already in place, questioning the need for us to set up our own. It will be fascinating to see how each service evolves over the next 50 years – will the PDNPA still have its own visitor facilities, or will cuts mean other organisations take on part of that role? Or will CNPA find it needs its own facilities after all? As they always say – only time will tell!

Andy Ford, Visitor Services Officer for the Cairngorms National Park Authority

Daniel Boys, Interpretation Officer for Peak Experience and Moor Care Project Officer for Moors for the Future





what's up elsewhere

leave your preconceptions behind...

Most interpreters are shameless appropriators and adapters of other folks' ideas. The Innovation in Cultural Heritage Interpretation project (ICHI) gives professionals interpreting Scotland's inheritance the opportunity to carry out this benign scavenging in other parts of Europe. Michael Hughes describes one such trip.

In 2007 a group of us went to Eastern Slovakia. We were encouraged to leave preconceptions behind and to absorb and enjoy a wide range of established, developing and potential tourist attractions, including museums, skansens¹, medieval towns, nature reserves and forests, customs and crafts and a vineyard. We experienced what the attractions had to offer as visitors and also talked to custodians and managers.

This was all set up by a small to medium-sized enterprise (SME) called Krajina, which is passionate about developing sustainable tourism within Eastern Slovakia, and selling it to the rest of the world. Miroslav Knezo, Krajina's managing director and our tireless guide and walking encyclopaedia, had an apparently inexhaustible supply of useful contacts. Miro arranged for us to stay in a monastery, interview the head of culture in a major region and eat traditional food in a private house.

There isn't room in this article to describe our experiences and insights in detail, but you can read about what we took back to apply to our work at home at <http://arch.blogware.com/blog/ICHI/ICHI2007Slovakia>

Here, I'll just give you a couple of snapshots from my notebook which I hope will convey something of the qualitative aspects of the exchange.



Blessing the Easter food

Religious Tourism

On Easter Sunday, we attended two services. The first was at 5.00am in Stropkov at the church attached to the monastery which was our home for the week. This was a very moving experience, first walking round the Church in the dim pre-dawn light, listening to the local mistle thrushes trying to compete with the service, which was sung unaccompanied in Slovakian and Old Church Slavonic by the entire congregation.

Nature and Countryside

I asked Miro whether Slovaks were interested in nature. "Yes very much so, but unlike in Scotland, the interest is very much tied to hunting and fishing which are very popular and carefully regulated and managed. Also harvesting - firewood, fungi and berries like wild raspberries". We were invited to join the Stropkov Touring (i.e. hiking) Club on their Easter Monday picnic. On a wonderfully sociable day, I was struck by how good it was to be in a part of the world where people are trusted to use forests in ways that are natural to a species that were hunter gatherers yesterday, archaeologically speaking. Could this be a model for community use of the large areas of new forest being created in Scotland? Could they be places where our children learn naturally but responsibly how forests can provide food, firewood, freedom and fun?

Interpretation in Slovakia

ARCH is not trying to change how interpretation is done in Eastern Slovakia. In fact, they challenged us to consider that they might actually be doing it better than we were in the UK, where a good deal of interpretation has arguably become institutionalised, produced to a set formula by consultants to meet an organisation's requirements. This vocational training exchange was undertaken under the auspices of the Innovation in Cultural Heritage Interpretation (ICHI) project, promoted and organised by ARCH Heritage and Management Training, and funded by the European Commission's 'Leonardo da Vinci' programme. ARCH welcome trainee applications for ICHI 2008. Contact Libby Urquhart at libby@archnetwork.org for further information.

Michael Hughes is a freelance interpreter, based in Fife michaelrhughes@f2s.com

¹Open air collection of relocated or replica traditional buildings

I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make them think.
Socrates

News

Obituary

How he brought the good news from Harper's Ferry to Battleby

Don Aldridge died on 12 February leaving a legacy that is synonymous with countryside interpretation in Scotland. In 1968, as Assistant Director of the Countryside Commission for Scotland, he continued an odyssey that began with visits to Harper's Ferry, the HQ of the US National Parks Service, gained direction in the Peak National Park, travelled far from his Battleby battle-station and ended only with his sudden death.

He inspired many interpreters with his messianic fervour, his intellect, his wit and his tireless advocacy of Tildenesque interpretation. If, latterly, he seemed disheartened by the twists and turns of the profession he helped instigate, it is because one man cannot be all men. He was special.

Michael H Glen, February 2008.

Interpretation sparking with vitality

Three hundred interpreters from 20 countries gathered in Aviemore last October at The Vital Spark conference. "I came away buzzing", "it was a fantastic three days" and "I thought the conference was brilliant" were only three of the comments recorded. Nine keynote speakers and 70 other presenters filled a programme of talks, workshops and visits.

The event opened noisily with Pipes of Thunder which contrasted with a gentle story from Angus Peter Campbell and much thought-provocation from Alastair McIntosh. Jane James from Australia then asserted that interpretation needs passion! Parallel sessions preceded a buffet supper which was capped magnificently by a performance by the Puppet State Theatre Company.

A waulking song group on Tuesday was followed by keynote papers from Susan Strauss, the much-admired US storyteller, and Shonaig Macpherson, chair of NTS. Visits to Glenmore Forest Park / Cairngorm Mountain and Culloden Battlefield gave everyone an appetite for the conference banquet followed by country dancing.

Young fiddlers opened the last morning when a talk by Jette Sandahl of Te Papa Tongarewa Museum was followed by historian James Hunter's reflective address, both about interpretation's importance to communities. Sam Ham closed the proceedings with the verdict that "The Vital Spark was the most beneficial and professional gathering I've attended in the past decade".

Tell us what you think

With an electronic version of the journal on the horizon, Interpret Scotland members would like to hear your views on this and other issues. To this end we have set up a brief readers' survey which can be accessed from www.interpretscotland.org.uk

Results of the survey will be published in the next issue of the journal, and will help guide design and content of future issues.

If you cannot access the survey electronically please contact Sue Atkinson, SNH, Battleby, Redgorton, Perth. PH1 3EW Tel: 01738 458538 and we'll send you a pre-paid paper copy.

National Treasures

Scotland's museums contain a treasure trove of wonderful things in collections that have in some cases developed over the last 300 years. Nationally important collections can be found in local authority museums, independent and university museums all over Scotland. In 2006 the Scottish Government launched a scheme to formally recognise collections deemed to be of national significance, and to provide financial support to aid their preservation and use. Successful applicants can bid in to the National Recognition Fund which can award grants of 100% of the project costs. Collections from Dumfries to Stromness and Aberdeen to Irvine have successfully demonstrated their national importance, and the first funding awards have been made. Further details are on the Museums/Galleries Scotland website: www.museumsgalleriesScotland.org.uk

Taking the chair

Bob Jones, Interpret Scotland's stalwart Chair for the past three and a half years, has passed on the role to a successor. Julie Forrest, Strategy and Communications Manager for Scottish Natural Heritage, took over the job in December 2007 and is looking forward to building on the success of The Vital Spark. Many thanks to Bob for all his hard work! And good luck to Julie!

Memory is a man's real possession. In nothing else is he rich,
in nothing else is he poor.

Alexander Smith

Building the sheep fank
Photo: Bob Powell



A museum in the park



© Highland Photographic Archive

The Highland Folk Museum was founded by Dr. I.F. Grant on Iona in 1935. After outgrowing the space on Iona, I.F. Grant took her collection to Laggan and then to Kingussie, where in 1944 she opened the first open air museum on mainland Britain. This vision has been developed and the museum now includes a large open air site, three miles from the original, in Newtonmore.

The museum collection in Kingussie and at Newtonmore consists of both material and non-material culture related to traditional Highland life. The material culture, or artefact collection, is wide ranging, from heather pot scrubbers to a tin church, from folk art to a Lewis blackhouse. The non-material culture is perhaps even more wide ranging, and includes memories, stories, songs, processes and practices as well as language.

Like many organisations working within the Cairngorms National Park one of our main roles is protection. While others may be protecting forestry, birds or our natural heritage, the museum is protecting and preserving material and non-material collections related to the cultural heritage of the Highlands.

Although our core collection represents the cultural heritage of the whole of the Scottish Highlands (and in some cases the Islands), being part of the Cairngorms National Park does put much of it in a more immediate context for visitors. Our introductory DVD, funded by the National Park, sets the scene in this way. Being part of the Park is also helping us to fulfil other aspects of our work. Our aim is to use the collections we protect and preserve to provide inspiration, learning and enjoyment for everyone.

Rhona Hamilton, assistant curator of the Highland Folk Museum, discusses how the Museum has been affected now it finds itself within the Cairngorms National Park, and how it sees its future.

The following is a case study of a recent project, in which being part of the Cairngorms National Park has helped us to make local connections to tell an important Highland story.

Bothy Project

The Shepherd's Bothy and Sheep Fank are the most recent additions to the Museum's collection of traditional buildings and structures. This has been a partnership project with a local community within the Park, and one that has been partly funded by the Cairngorms National Park Authority. The Museum has worked with Laggan Heritage, a very active local community history group, to preserve the Presmuchrach Shepherd's Bothy and to recreate a dry stone sheep fank (shelter), using stone from a ruined fank near Dalwhinnie. For Laggan Heritage this preserves a local structure and important local stories with it. For the Museum this bothy can help visitors learn about a way of life that has all but disappeared, and allows us to communicate the way of life represented by these structures.

In most parts of the Museum, much of the interpretation is provided through live interpreters, who interact with visitors. This method of interpretation also allows the process to be two-way, with staff enriching their own knowledge and understanding.

Due to their size and position on the site, the bothy and fank cannot be fully interpreted in this way. Much thought has gone into the planning of the interpretative text, however, so that visitors will be able to get as much as possible from the experience. Processes covered elsewhere in the museum through demonstrations (such as buttermaking, ropemaking and the pole lathe) will mainly

be represented through artefacts and photographs, although we will also be able to feature some sheep shearing as part of our demonstration programme. The two-way interaction which usually takes place between interpreter and visitor has also played a part in this project through the strong partnership between Laggan Heritage and the Museum. We have used the stories from Laggan Heritage members who lived and worked in similar buildings to inform our interpretation – preserving them for future generations.

As well as our role within the Cairngorms National Park, we also have a role as a local authority museum, run by The Highland Council. The Council's Gaelic Language Plan is something that is playing an increasing role in interpretation both here and at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery. All new interpretation will be in English and Gaelic, which will help to promote and preserve the Gaelic language.

Through this project we have added to our collection, increased community links and been able to interpret for our visitors a way of life that was important within the Highlands, but which has now changed beyond recognition. Being within the Cairngorms National Park we have also been able to look at ways of serving both our local and Highland wide communities. It has also opened up opportunities for developing partnerships with other organisations within the Park area.

**Rhona Hamilton, Assistant Curator,
Highland Folk Museum, Kingussie
www.highlandfolk.com**

All that glisters is not gold.

William Shakespeare, the Merchant of Venice, Act II, Scene VII

The fourth in the series of Interpret Scotland guides to interpretation. Mary Hudson, an interpretive planner with the National Trust for Scotland, looks at selecting interpretive media.

The art of Communication

selecting interpretive media

One of the greatest sins committed in interpretation is that of choosing interpretive media before the other elements of planning have been completed. There are some fantastic media solutions out there and it is easy to be seduced into thinking about how wonderful they could look without first deciding what you want to say and who you want to say it to?

Below is a list of some of the pros and cons of some of those media options:

Medium	Advantages	Disadvantages
Graphic Panels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach a large audience • Low maintenance • Need no supervision • Combine text and images • Help to orientate visitors • Can be produced on a relatively low budget. • Can be produced using a variety of materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour of reading, even a concise amount of text, may put visitors off. • May have a negative landscape impact • May be prone to vandalism • Difficult for visitors to retain information, eg, orientation panels
Creative installations, sculpture etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be designed to be sensitive to the surrounding landscape • Can be interactive • Provide aesthetic interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often expensive to commission • Can be difficult to make message clear • Can be fragile and may not age well
Publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be used on and off site • Can contain more detail than a panel • Aid orientation • Can be produced on a relatively low budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be effectively distributed • Reprints can be costly • May be discarded as litter
Live interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very effective form of interpretation • Flexible • Can present a complex story • Can encourage interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strict quality control is required • Can be costly in terms of salaries, training needs and consultant fees • Needs good marketing and administration
Audio tours & PDAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can use narrative to tell a story • Can hold a significant amount of information • Quantity of information can encourage repeat visits • Can help with visitor flow and orientation • Potentially more captivating than written forms of interpretation • Can be multi-lingual • Visually unobtrusive • Can generate income • Flexible – can be adapted to work with ipods, mobile phones etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be expensive to produce and maintain • Can isolate users from each other • Operational considerations for distributing tours • Not easy – or cheap – to update
Multimedia installations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can encourage interaction • Modern appeal • Can combine pictures, text and sound • Can allow access to an archive of information • Can be reproduced for sale and generate income • Can encourage repeat visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive to develop and install • Hardware costs can be high • Maintenance can be extremely costly • Staff required to deal with everyday operation of equipment • Can be solitary, eg touch screens • If broken, leaves a void
AV presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can communicate a significant amount of information • Can use a variety of presentation methods • Can reach a large audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production and hardware costs can be high • Noise pollution can be a problem if no dedicated space for screening
Visitor Centres & exhibitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a complex story • Can be a major attraction • Can contain a wide range of media and presentation styles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very expensive to build and run • Lots of competition • Needs highly professional management • Maintenance costs can be significant

With such an overwhelming number of options, selecting interpretive media can be a complex business. However, by weighing up the pros and cons of each medium, it is possible to produce interpretation that is worth its weight in gold.

Mary Hudson, Interpretive Planner, National Trust for Scotland www.nts.org.uk

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

The Adopt-a-monument scheme

Helen Bradley, Adopt-a-Monument Officer with the Council for Scottish Archaeology, explains how the scheme benefits both the monuments and the local communities who care about them.

In the 1990s a number of local archaeological societies were itching to get more involved in looking after their local heritage. As a result the Council for Scottish Archaeology (CSA) set up the Adopt-a-Monument Scheme. The Scheme proved very popular, but had to be shelved in the late 90s when it was no longer possible to fund a dedicated officer. However, interest in the scheme never really died down, and in response to a spate of new enquiries a few years ago CSA successfully applied to Historic Scotland for funds to support a new Adopt-a-Monument Officer post.

The scheme offers support and advice to community groups who want to take on heritage projects that deal with the key themes of conservation, access improvement, and interpretation. There are currently ten projects underway all over Scotland. They range from restoring an 18th century folly in the Western Isles to creating a heritage trail connecting five stone circles in Perthshire. There are innovative experiments such as reconstructing a prehistoric 'burnt mound' site on Shetland, through to the creation of a monastic garden in the grounds of a Borders Priory, a project which embraces both natural and cultural heritage.

The scheme provides training in a range of skills tailored to the needs of each group. This includes survey and recording; documentary research; project management; fundraising; hosting educational events, and interpretive planning - you name it, we provide it, or else find someone who can!

The real benefit of the scheme is the symbiosis between monument and community. The monument itself is conserved, celebrated and interpreted for the future, and the act of participating in the

project brings the group together with new skills and confidence, and a real sense of ownership of the heritage on its doorstep.

The interpretive side of Adopt-a-Monument poses real challenges for communities. They need to achieve two things which at first seem mutually exclusive - enabling the individual experience or 'feel' of a monument to be enjoyed freely without too much prescription; but also making it as physically and intellectually accessible as possible. Monuments convey their own palpable atmosphere to interested visitors, and this is one of the reasons why people value them so highly. Take prehistoric sites for example; these often engender a sense of remoteness in time and a partly-alien quality which we must be careful not to stifle with over-interpretation. Conversely, at sites nestling at the heart of residential developments there is often a sense that the incongruous is in fact the reassuringly familiar, invisible even. In these situations something show-stoppingly creative is needed in order to bring a monument to life. Those groups trying to get to grips with the interpretive process have to understand these diverse ways that people will experience a monument before embarking on any interpretation work.

There is also a crucial balance to be struck between 'what does our monument, mean to us?' and 'how can we effectively communicate the overall importance of this monument to others?' Community groups adopt sites in the first place because they have a deep, usually very personal, connection to a monument. But the interpreters must avoid a blinkered approach where a local and specific passion for a site becomes its only story. Value is not just local (though this is of vital importance), it is often also national

(and increasingly global). This must be integrated into the interpretation to prevent it alienating visitors from outside the local area. This is why we encourage groups to take into account all their potential audiences through research, consultation and the production of an interpretive plan.

The often hugely contrasting local perceptions of what is meaningful and communicable about a monument pose an unrelenting challenge to interpreters, both community members and external advisors. As with all community-led work the glue which holds these projects together is active and constant discussion, without which an end result may be achieved, but one which really tells only half the story. The usefulness of the CSA's involvement here lies in facilitating this interpretive process (which can seem so daunting at first) and helping groups to accommodate broad perceptions of what is important about a monument through their interpretive approach.

**Helen Bradley, Adopt-a-Monument Officer,
Council for Scottish Archaeology
www.scottisharchaeology.org.uk**

A similar scheme, Scotland's Rural Past, is a five-year nationwide project launched by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland in October 2006.

Details are available at:
www.LTScotland.org.uk/news/2008/educational/january/news_tcm4464496.asp