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what to do and how to do it

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Scotching the Myth
The event of 2002

the journal for Scotland's Interpreters

Interpret Scotland

issue 4 | autumn 2001

is it working?

Interpret Scotland

www.interpretscotland.org.uk

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Issue 4: Is it working? - evaluating interpretation; Autumn 2001

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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Contents

Next edition

The next edition of the journal will take a look at **'Language and Interpretation'.** Please contact the editor with any letters, news items and articles. **Copy deadline is 7 January 2002.**

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

Cover picture - 'Beacon' by Allan Watson, Tyrebagger Sculpture Trail, Kincardine. Forest Life Picture Library

Is it **working?**

Is it working?..... Do we care?..... The answer to the latter is probably "*Yes but*... the next job beckons!" Evaluation, a noble intent, then falls by the wayside, and the answer to the former must be "We don't know!"

And where is the evaluation that led the Scottish Executive to commit serious money to an already affluent marketing industry to promote Scotland (mostly overseas) - a response to the Foot and Mouth recovery process - rather than direct to the imperilled providers of tourist services – often 'interpreters' who deliver the product on the ground.

The belief is shout loud about Scotland, and visitors will flock here. However, in a world of exotic beaches and genuinely warm climes just a budget-flight away, most tourists come to Scotland for more specific reasons - the favourable exchange rate, or heritage connections. The tragedy of September 11th and its effect on international tourism have acutely demonstrated this.

In reality Scotland is full of midges, it rains a lot, the service is often perfunctory, usually expensive, souvenirs are frequently tacky, and the water is cold. The lasting quality of the experience is doubtful, and this should concern us most. If the 'product' is good, the tourist will follow. And we can only improve through evaluation, *by seeing if what we have got is indeed really working!*

Finding good evaluation case studies for this issue was difficult – which speaks volumes. If we are to make real in-roads into improving interpretation - the heart of tourism – we must be robust about how the 'product' performance is measured. For example, every project budget should include a '% for evaluation' – like the '1% for art' initiative in public buildings. And we should share that evaluation, building up a body of knowledge to help others. Interpret Scotland could play a key role in this, but we need experienced 'evaluators' at the table. The list of IS steering group participants shows a notable empty seat – tourism!

Bob Jones
Head of Design & Interpretation – Forestry Commission

Interpret Scotland is published twice a year and is distributed free on request. **If you would like to join the mailing list, or if you are receiving duplicate copies,** please contact Eilidh Strang at Scottish Natural Heritage on 01738 444177 email: **eilidh.strang@snh.gov.uk.** You could also visit the Interpret Scotland website: **www.interpretscotland.org.uk**

"I have not failed. I have just found 10,000 ways that don't work"
Thomas Edison, American inventor of the light bulb

Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?

Evaluation has an unenviable reputation. Mention it and defences rise. Do we fear evaluation as destructive and discouraging, like school exams used to be? Is it really a big bad wolf, or is it in fact our greatest ally?

I speak as someone who has evaluated and survived, and who believes that evaluation is undeniably a good thing. Evaluation ensures our interpretation is achieving what we want, and is a mark of professionalism in. As David Uzzell[1] put it

"interpretation without evaluation is essentially self-indulgent"

However, we need to understand what evaluating our interpretation can do for us, whether it is a guided walk or a million pound visitor attraction. Here's why we too should all evaluate:

1. Ensure each visitor understands our message

I am passionate about interpretation, and this passion comes from experiencing good interpretation. I am sure you can think of an interpreter or an interpretive experience that has inspired and left a lasting impression on you. When we interpret for others we want them to have that same lasting experience.

As interpreters, our aim is to impart messages to our visitors. This communication process is often central to the visitors' experience. Would you talk to someone and not care if they heard, or if they left more confused than when you started? Of course not!

However good our intentions are, we must ensure the people we are communicating with actually understand us.

2. Meet our visitor's desires

We may think we know what is in the visitor's mind, but do we? Imagine if they have a different burning question that they want answering? As a young ranger I planned a guided woodland walk in great detail. As I began to interpret the forest, a child discovered a frog. Instantly the whole group formed a circle peering in wonder at shiny green eyelids that opened from within a shallow puddle. There was only one thing to do - talk about this enthralling little frog. They asked their questions, not mine.

Only by asking our visitors what they are interested in can we really give them what they want.

3. Meet our management objectives

It is easy to forget that interpretation is a powerful tool for managing people. By influencing where people go and what they do, interpretation achieves management objectives. We spend great sums of money on management, such as protecting a habitat or an ancient building. Through evaluation we can understand visitors' motivations and why they may want to go one way when we want them to go another.

With evaluation, interpretation helps us gain public support and cooperation to protect precious resources.

This theatrical guided walk was great fun, but what message did it communicate?

David Masters

4. Meet financial, corporate and political objectives

Think about employers, administrators, managers and politicians. Their job is to spend an ever-decreasing pot of money on whatever best meets the public need. The first law of economics is that there is no such thing as a free lunch. In the same way there is no such thing as free interpretation[2]. Evaluation helps us secure interpretation's slice of limited funds. This is even more critical where interpretation is fundamental to the quality of the visitor experience (and thus to the competitive advantage of our tourism and heritage industry, and to growing demands for equal access). Our challenge is to show that interpretation is not a luxury, but an essential service that provides multiple benefits for society.

The best way to promote interpretation is to prove its value.

An agenda for better evaluation

Currently very little evaluation takes place in Scotland, and in the long term the quality of our interpretation can only suffer. Here's how I suggest this could be remedied:

- It is time to cut the size or number of projects, and through evaluation ensure better quality.
- Funding agencies should demand proper evaluation, and recognise the time and money needed to do it.
- The findings of evaluation studies should be widely disseminated.
- We should all continually reflect on what we do and where we can make improvements.

Promoting evaluation in this way reminds me of my Grandmother, who would say in a strong Yorkshire accent, 'he who makes no mistakes, makes nothing'. To make mistakes is human, and only through evaluation can we learn from them. Granny was not afraid of the big bad wolf, and nor should we be!

Hugh Muschamp is Chair of the Scottish Interpretation Network and Project Officer for the Paths for All Partnership. Tel 01259 218888, hugh.muschamp@pathsforall.org.uk

[1]Uzzell D 1985. Management Issues in the Provision of Countryside Interpretation, Leisure Studies Vol4 pp159-174
[2]Beck L and Capel T 1998. Interpretation for the 21st Century, Sagamore Publishing

"I can't understand why people are afraid of new ideas. I'm afraid of the old ones"
John Cage, musician.

it's as easy as DIY

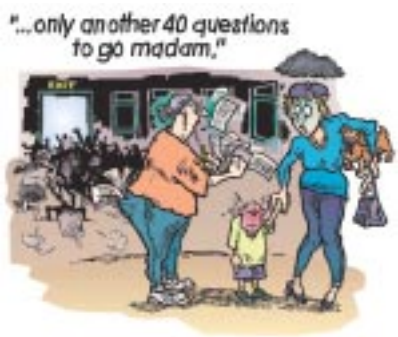
a checklist to help you evaluate

Evaluation is an increasingly important element of interpretive practice. But what's it about and how do you do it? Here we present a checklist of evaluation methodologies to get you going...

1 **What do you want to find out?** Set yourself some precise study objectives. Questions might include: What have visitors learned about the uses of sphagnum moss from our exhibition? What emotions and attitudes are evoked by the Highland Clearances? Does this exhibit attract and communicate with its intended audience?

2 **Can you identify clear interpretive objectives against which performance can be evaluated?** If the interpretation has been well planned they will be in the plan, the design brief, or be self-evident, but if not, you will have to derive them.

3 **Evaluation isn't just about finding out whether something is successful or not.** It can also help improve planning and design so that the final product is tailored to its audience. Evaluation is classified according to when in the planning process it is undertaken:



- **Front end analysis** is done at the start and aims to find out what visitors might feel or know about a topic to help develop your interpretive objectives.
- **Formative evaluation** is done during the design stage with mock-ups to test that the graphics, text, and design work as intended.
- **Summative evaluation** is done when the interpretation is complete. Its purpose is to determine success.

4 **What methods are you going to use?** The answer to this question will depend in part on how you answer the questions above. A major distinction is made between:

- **Quantitative methods** which count and measure things. Here all your data is already in the form of numbers, or is converted to numbers, which can be presented in the form of means, percentages, pie charts and graphs, and have statistical analysis applied to it.
- **Qualitative methods** which attempt to describe and understand feelings, attitudes and opinions, but not measure or count them.

5 **Observational methods** involve watching visitors to determine, what they do, how long they take, where they go, etc:

- **Behavioural observation** uses a checklist of relevant behaviour such as reads label, talks to companion, presses button, turns wheel, etc.
- **Tracking** with a floor plan notes the course taken by one visitor at a time. It needs to be unobtrusive! It should preferably be done from a single observation point without following your visitor round.
- **Behavioural mapping** maps space into appropriate units and count the number of people in those spaces at predetermined times e.g. every 30 minutes.

- **Stopping power** is a simple numerical index of an exhibit's effectiveness at drawing people's attention. Here you observe the exhibit and count the number of people who stop, together with the total number who pass by or stop. The ratio of these two figures is the stopping power. Holding power is the time visitors actually spend once stopped, divided by the time required to engage with exhibit, a measure of how effective the exhibit is at sustaining attention.

6 **Questionnaire methods** are popular, but work only if the questions are well designed, requiring visitors to respond with simple factual information they already have (e.g. where they live) or can be expected to pick up from the interpretation. They can use devices like tick boxes, show cards, and rating scales, and can be designed to be administered via interview or for self-completion.

7 **Qualitative methods** include focus groups, in depth single interviews and accompanied visits. Use them when visitor responses may be complex or not well understood. Results are presented in the form of summaries and paraphrases of discussions with evidence in the form of quotes. Focus groups require clear discussion guides and group facilitation skills.

8 **Sampling issues.** With quantitative methods you will need to ensure that the responses you collect are representative of the larger population you wish to draw conclusions about, are unbiased, and that you have enough data.

9 **Remember** no one method is better than any other, they do different things. Often you will need to deploy more than one method.

10 **Pilot all methods** and revise in the light of practical experience.

11 **Finally** please ensure that a portion of your budget is allocated to evaluation!

Carl Atkinson works with CEI Associates, Tel 0161 274 3337. He will shortly become Senior Interpretive Officer with the Countryside Council for Wales.

Illustrations by: Objectives, George Mitchell

"Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new"
Albert Einstein, genius.

Going Live

One week in November 2000, strange things were going in within the calm walls of the Museum of Scotland. Galleries echoed to the sounds of howling wolves and cries of "All aboard!" The outline of a body languished in front of a Victorian train, small children gathered sticks to construct an enormous campfire in the Early People Gallery, and an appalling outbreak of seasickness ravaged visitors on Level 4.

That week marked the outcome of the first phase of a pilot project of live interpretation for schools in the Museum. After six months collaboration between NMS Education, an advisory group, and children's theatre company *Wee Stories Theatre for Children*, we finally had two lively interactive educational performances. *History Mystery: Ticket to America* dealt with emigration from Scotland and the nature of history whilst *The Wolf's Tale and Other Stories of the Wild* explored Scotland's wildlife. From the rapt faces of six year olds engaged in 'hunting for stories' to enthusiastic teacher comment forms, it was clear that on many levels we had created a product which appealed to our visitors and which, when measured against our aims, could be judged a success.

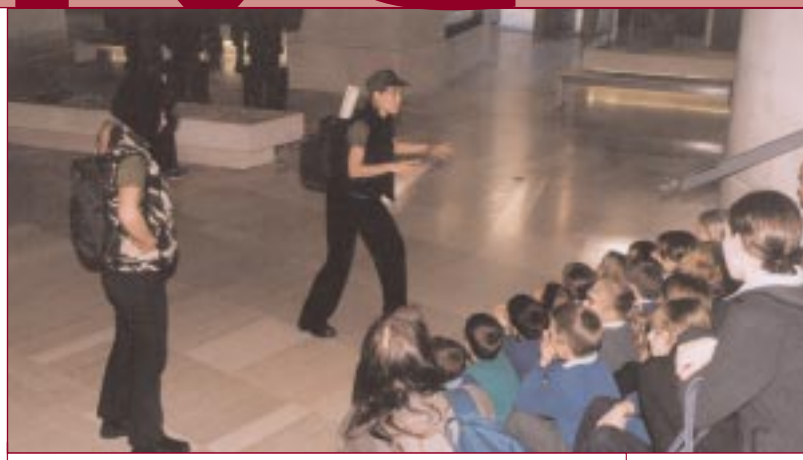
"from the start, evaluation was at the top of the agenda"

From the start, evaluation was at the top of the agenda. This was not a one off project, and we were prepared to invest considerable time and money in developing a model for delivering live interpretation which worked and on which we would build in future years. So we wanted to get it right. We therefore built in opportunities for evaluating the project on an ongoing basis, seeking opportunities for feedback and input on what we were doing and what we were planning at every stage, from thinking about 'what would work?' to 'would this work?' to 'did it work?'

Once the project aims had been decided, research into good practice was essential to explore how others were using live interpretation. A trip to several museums with live interpretation enabled me to gain a feel for the variety of methods used, to observe performances, and to talk to practitioners about their work. This helped me to start thinking in a more focussed way about 'what would work?'

To select and adapt those methods which seemed most appropriate, I was guided by an advisory group of teachers, educational advisers, drama college staff, the City of Edinburgh Arts Unit, the Scottish Arts Council, and representatives from potential deliverers such as the Scottish Storytelling Centre and theatre companies. This group identified themes likely to be attractive to schools, helped identify styles of presentation that would engage children, and helped find solutions to questions such as who would deliver the programme and how they should be recruited.

One of the members of the advisory group and his students offered to develop and deliver a short live programme which we could then pre-test on schools who were invited to the Museum for this purpose. Teachers and pupils then filled in short evaluation forms, and members of the advisory group were also able to observe and comment. This provided extremely useful material that enabled us to establish what aspects were popular with the audiences and to hear their suggestions for improvement.



What 'cognitive and emotional engagement' are these kids experiencing?

Museum of Scotland

Following the actual performances, evaluation forms were completed by pupils and teachers. In general, their response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. Both teachers and pupils gave evidence of cognitive and emotional engagement with the pieces, and there was clear evidence of changes in attitude: one pupil came out with 'I now think history is cool' while another teacher commented that her pupils 'talked about it on the bus on the way home.' Other comments related to practical issues such as the timing and length of performances, marketing material, and teacher support material. Again, teachers and pupils provided constructive comments as to how these aspects might be improved.

All of this contributed to an evaluation report, which attempted to answer the question 'did this work?' We are now using this report in re-working the two pieces for the next school year.

"because of the evaluation we can plan with confidence"

Because the evaluation has shown that the pilot was successful, we can plan with confidence for the next school year. We will repeat both the shows, and are developing a new piece exploring Scots language, called *Tae a Mouse and a' That.* We also plan to perform both pieces for a family audience at weekends. The evaluative model we developed first time round has helped us develop a pilot programme for pre-school children in the museum called *A Piece of Cake,* where we consulted and tested material with nursery and family groups. The relationship with Wee Stories is strengthening as they become more familiar with the challenges of working in a museum environment, and we and the gallery staff become more familiar with working with actors. Let the play continue!

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"Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm"
Ralph Waldo Emerson. Poet and writer.

childs

John Ververka

Evaluation has long been a part of any interpretive planning strategy, especially for interpretive centre or museum exhibits. When you consider the expense of an exhibition, you would think that the commissioning agency would want to make sure it "worked", i.e. accomplished the objectives it was designed for. Unfortunately such evaluation rarely happens, and many exhibits quietly "fail" to make any contact with their audience.

I was recently a part of the Derse Exhibits team to plan, design, build and evaluate 60 exhibits for the new Kirby Science Center in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. They had three empty floors and wanted top quality science exhibits to fill the building – a $3,000,000 project. Part of the client's requirement was a thorough pre-testing of exhibits to make sure each accomplished its interpretive objectives. This article summarises the evaluation and what we learned from this sometimes 'wrenching' experience.

What were the exhibits supposed to do?

Before you can evaluate anything you have to know what it's supposed to do. Part of our approach was to produce an "Interpretive Exhibit Plan". This consisted of identifying – in writing - a specific concept each individual exhibit was to present, and specific learning, behavioral and emotional objectives each had to deliver. We then evaluated full-scale pilot mock-up exhibits against these objectives.

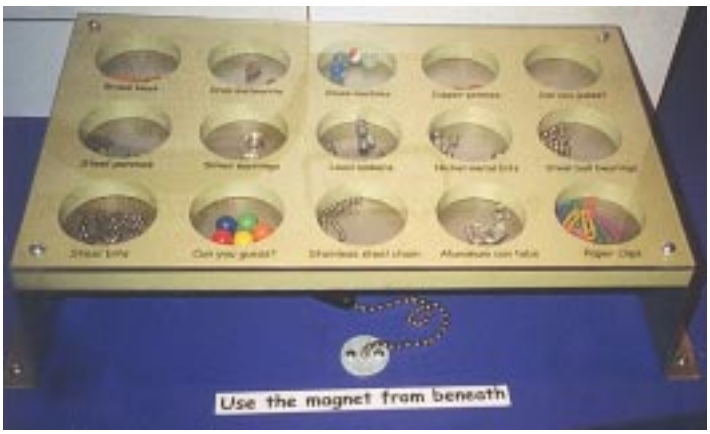
The evaluation strategy

The evaluation took 4 weeks of testing mock-up exhibits in the warehouse of Derse Exhibits, using the following methods:

- **A written pre test and post test.** We brought in buses of children from local schools to be our "audience". Before being allowed to use the exhibits, each group took a short written test relating to each exhibit's objectives. After this the children could then go and "use" the exhibits. After spending about 45 minutes with the exhibits they came back for a written post test. We wanted to see if there was any change in what they knew before and after using the exhibits.
- **Observational Studies.** We used a trained observer stationed at each exhibit to watch and record what the children did or didn't do. This told us a lot about things like instructions, graphic placements, and subjects that children did and didn't have any interest in.
- **The quick fix – fix – and fix again.** We had two groups of children test the exhibits on the Monday of each of the four weeks. We then analysed the results and made changes to the exhibits on Tuesday. On Wednesday we brought in new children, recorded their results, and made further corrections on Thursday. We did one final test on Friday, and made any final adjustments that were still necessary before shipping out the completed exhibits at the weekend. Intensive stuff!

What we found out – Oh the pain!

What did we learn from our experience? Most importantly, we learned that without the pre-testing, the great majority of the exhibits would have failed! Virtually EVERY exhibit had to be "fixed" in some way. Here are a few examples of what we observed:



John Ververka

John Ververka

With this exhibit on "magnetism" users were originally directed to move the magnet on the chain **under** the objects, the magnetic items would then move. Not one child followed these directions. They only used the magnet from **above!** They wanted to see the magnet on the chain interact directly with the item in the exhibit. We fixed this by changing the directions and raising items in each container so magnetic objects would react with the magnet held from above. We found that children found written directions to be "invisible". In 98% of the cases the children did not look at or read **any** directions unless an adult suggested they do so. If they had to read complex directions to do the activity – they usually left the activity.

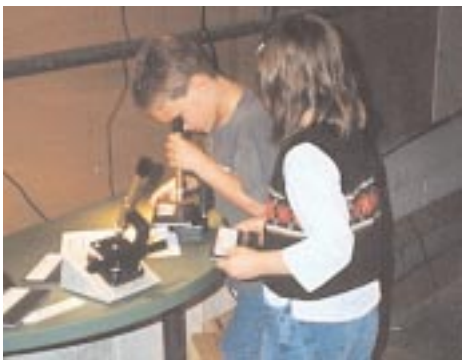
"I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make them think."
Socrates, Greek philosopher

play

John Ververka

Another interesting example of how children think was our "how bats find food" exhibit.

The exhibit has a sensor beam (arrow) that beeped when a person walked in front of it. As the child walked closer to the exhibit the beep would beep faster to illustrate bats eco-location ability. We found that the children made games out of the exhibit beeper trying to run past the beam, crawl under it, etc. They were **only** interested in the beam and how it worked - they couldn't care less about the bats!



John Ververka

We also tested the construction of the exhibits themselves, and some of the exhibit tools. For example, our "indestructible" microscopes didn't last a week!

With constant use, and having the children lean on, push and tug the microscopes about, they quickly came un-mounted. The exhibit designers had to experiment with a fastening system that was "difficult" for children to break. Break proof exhibits for children are a dream! Most of the exhibit design team, used to doing exhibits for adults, found the childrens' exhibits an emotional and creative challenge. Children don't think like us!!

Summary

This short article only touches on some of the complex educational and design challenges we encountered. My goal was to explain why we should evaluate our interpretation, and this project helped us create exhibits that were educationally successful. Evaluation is a vital requirement for true exhibit success.

John Veverka, interpretive planning consultant and trainer; www.heritageinterp.com or jvainterp@aol.com

What we learned

The evaluation taught us a lot, but most importantly that without it we would have built exhibits using adult ideas of how children learn that bore no relation to their experience. Some key points are as follows:

♦ The students already had good understanding of certain subjects, but in other areas they had a very poor understanding. We found that when comparing their pre-test and post-test results, there were often increases in correct answers, depending on the individual exhibits. So the exhibits were generally working – but the initial post-test improvements were very weak, may be only 5-15% improvements on the pre-test scores (Monday testing). But by Friday, after the exhibits had gone through many changes in design, instructions presentation, and concept presentation, we were averaging 80% comprehension or better on post testing for most exhibits. Most worrying though, for a couple of the exhibits the initial post testing showed a **reduction** in the childrens' knowledge after they had used the exhibit– suggesting that they had actually become confused rather than learnt anything! By doing this formative evaluation, we ended up with "very good to excellent" exhibits as far as having their educational objectives accomplished at a 70% level or higher.

♦ **Every** exhibit we evaluated (about 60 in total) needed improving. Some exhibits just required a little fix – such as the addition of a label that said "push the button" (otherwise the button to start the activity would not be pushed), whilst others needed a major re-design.

♦ The children did not even look at, let alone read any "written" instructions. But we did have success in redesigning instructions in cartoon or "comic book" formats – ie visual instructions. The instructions themselves **had to look fun or interesting.** For many of these exhibits to be used most efficiently a science educator or teacher would be required to help facilitate and direct the learning activity. But the exhibits did work effectively on their own after evaluation driven re-designs. When our researchers facilitated the learning – explaining directions, etc. the exhibits worked wonderfully.

♦ What seemed to us to be good ideas for creative exhibits could **completely fail** in practice. These were chastising and sometimes difficult lessons for the design team and our fragile design egos!

♦ The total **cost** of the evaluation programme was $60,000 – 2% of the total project budget. Money very well spent indeed.

♦ The **only** way to know for sure if you have a "successful" exhibit is to evaluate it with your intended target market group. Your visitors can only tell you whether your exhibit is working if you ask them!

"You cannot depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus"
Mark Twain, writer

research review

The National Trust for Scotland

The National Trust for Scotland Interpretative Audit

Last autumn saw the first comprehensive audit of interpretation by The National Trust for Scotland; a historical juncture a new generation of interpreters has been waiting for. As a principal player in the interpretation industry, the Trust's project acknowledged that evaluation is the first stage in a strategy of revitalization. It was designed to produce a thorough inventory and assess the quality of the Trust's interpretation.

The audit questionnaire was adapted from the Highland Interpretive Strategy Project interpretation survey . It enabled each property to be categorized and its interpretation classified by media and topic. This mapped the 'what' and 'where' of the Trust's interpretation.

The quality assessment was based on scoring the interpretation against a series of modest criteria e.g. 'Does it draw attention to specific features that you can see, touch, hear, smell and taste?' and 'Does the interpretive text relate to its audience (e.g. by addressing the audience as 'you', or by using analogy, metaphor, humour or poetry)?'

In my experience, the 'Yes/No' questionnaire design encouraged a ruthless judgment that, in the case of the properties in the NTS South region, was generally negative. For example:

- Most interpretation did not ask visitors to look at, touch, smell or taste what was being interpreted.
- Most interpretative text did not relate to its audience.
- Most sites had multi-media equipment that was not in working order.
- Most printed material did not suggest other places to visit or explore that were connected to the main subject.

The results are a clear indication of the challenge the Trust must meet in improving its interpretation. However, the audit was not without its limitations. There are three key points to note here that will be relevant to other wide-scale evaluation / audit studies:

1. It is difficult to objectively measure the overall effect of the interpretation at a site or property. Sometimes the individual elements scored badly, but collectively the interpretation seemed to 'work' as a whole.

2. The audit only addressed interpretation, not other aspects of visitor communication such as signage and orientation. The visitor experience starts with the signage that directs them to the site. On arrival they encounter staff, merchandising, interpretive displays, printed words, guides etc. All these combine to influence the way a site is presented to visitors, and therefore the quality of their communication experience.

3. The audit's quantitative basis produced measurable statistics of use (and understandable!) at boardroom level. However, the interpretive experience cannot be expressed in quantitative terms alone: one person may like an audio installation whilst another feels that noise of any kind is inappropriate. These qualitative responses are too subjective to be measured by ticking boxes on a questionnaire.

Nevertheless, the results clearly show the existing interpretation is in need of replacing rather than simply upgrading. The National Trust For Scotland should be applauded for sticking its neck out and asking 'What have we got and is it any good?'

Kirstie Jamieson did the interpretive audit of the NTS Southern Region, Tel 0131 554 9605

The Impact of Visitor Centres in Rural Areas

The Countryside Agency commissioned a study to look at the impacts of visitor centres on their local area and how these could be improved. Eight centres were investigated, and the main findings are:

- The local economic and social benefits were limited, and the centres were more concerned with providing services for visitors than achieving local benefits.
- Centres were originally established to influence visitors 'awareness and understanding'; but over time financial targets replaced strategic objectives in importance.
- Internal displays were limited and rejuvenation was restricted by lack of funding.
- The location of centres was critical in relation to their overall impact on the local economy.

The research concludes there is little justification for an expansion in the provision of centres. Proposals should be judged on their merits with particular attention to location and ways to increase local benefits. The study recommended that visitor centres should:

- Identify specific actions for their staff that would maximise local benefits.
- Prioritise functions within the centre in line with overall objectives and the type of location.
- Strengthen relationships with other local enterprises.
- Promote the centre as a visitor destination.
- Strengthen the quality of interpretation and provide links with local tourist information points.
- Provide extra activities.
- Maximise the use of local staff and materials.
- Regularly evaluate visitor satisfaction.

Countryside Agency Research Note CRN 11, July 2000. Tel: 01242 521381, info@countryside.gov.uk

"There are no days in life so memorable as those which vibrated to some stroke of the imagination"
Ralph Waldo Emerson, poet and writer.

letters

Taking the fun out of interpretation?

Dear Editor

This was heard recently at a meeting – "Evaluation; taking the fun out of interpretation". There are many good reasons for evaluating what interpreters are doing, and there are still many people who are not evaluating at all. But let's have a bit of caution and think about its impact on creativity.

Good interpretation is lively, sparky and of course provocative. It takes risks, tries something different and sometimes succeeds brilliantly and at others doesn't quite get there. Think of the newspaper style panels at Glenmore Forest Park – I can picture them in my head. A lasting memory of the centre. Compare this with the safe, sameness of many 'visitor attractions'.

Arguably one of the biggest and most successful developments of a sense of place of the last few years is Grizedale Forest. Some of the work in the Lake District is provocative, some relates, and some reveals. Each piece may only do one of these. Walking through the forest with children is an interesting experience. Looking for sculptures they SEE the forest, spotting things they would otherwise have skimmed over. The presence of artwork leaves a lasting impression. How would you evaluate this?

A few years ago in North Wales, I worked with artist Teena Gould on a community project to waymark a trail around ex-industrial land that was now of nature conservation interest. Teena had a strong vision and creative control, and I wanted a set of waymarks and the community to be involved. By the end over 1,000 people had helped to shape and make the small sculptures. The designs came from the community but reflected Teena's artistic input. We both took risks and had to trust each other:

- On site, if you know the story of clay and brick working, each finished piece reflects something of the place.
- Or they can be seen as sculpture.
- Or they raise questions which a viewer will have to go elsewhere to find the answers.
- Or they are hideous intrusions in the landscape.

What would we evaluate here – can people follow the trail, do people understand the sculptures, what about the benefits of the process?

Interpretation is creative. I worry that evaluation, the need to evaluate, and the limited repertoire that the majority of evaluation uses, will squash the truly imaginative projects. We need to ensure that a range of evaluation techniques are available, and that good research can be done. How long will it be before a project manager rejects something creative in favour of panels because they can be easily evaluated, the box ticked and the grant claimed? Don't throw the baby out with the water.

Kev Theaker
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Will the need to evaluate 'squash' the truly imaginative projects like these at Grizedale?

Forest Life Picture Library

Do you feel inspired?

Dear Editor

I've just been tucking into the latest copy of Interpret Scotland, and I love the quotes at the top of the pages. Where do you get them from?

This leads me on to wondering if there is an opportunity to explore 'inspiration for interpretation' in Interpret Scotland? This might be a difficult subject to pin down, but it's an important undisclosed component of successful interpretation. There's now quite a lot of information about the practical aspects of good interpretation, but how can we nurture creativity and inspiration - the spark that's so often lacking?

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Editor's note: The quotes we print in Interpret Scotland are found on the web – e.g. www.quoteland.com or www.quotationspage.com

You raise an important point about the need to nurture creativity and inspiration, and their importance in producing good interpretation. We would welcome any 'inspirational' ideas about how to do this from readers.

what's up elsewhere

In this edition we bring you topical news of a research and evaluation study from Australia

Signs signs everywhere
(but are they being read?)

Interpretive panels are only effective if people read them. Researchers from the Tourism Department at James Cook University, Australia, tested four different versions of a rainforest interpretation panel to see which would work best. The results confirm the opinions of experienced interpreters – that visitors are more likely to read signs which attract their attention and which are clear and easy to understand.

The study

An interpretive panel was selected from the Daintree National Park (version A), and three alternative versions were prepared:

Version B - written in point form with a narrative text

Version C - written in point form in a conversational style

Version D - written in paragraph form in a conversational style

User surveys were carried out to see which panel format visitors preferred.

The verdict

The majority of visitors preferred panel C, which was written in a conversational style and presented in point form. Second preference was for panel B, followed by D and lastly A (the real panel scored worst!)

Respondents indicated they preferred C because the information was clearly stated and it was easy to read and understand. The readers liked the informal language and point format, and felt the panel best attracted their attention. With panel D they did not even read the vital warning text because it was too 'wordy'.

This simple evaluation indicated that a key interpretive panel, intended to prevent visitors from harming themselves, can be made considerably more effective.

Overall, the research suggests that panels are more effective if written in a conversational style with descriptive and colourful words. They are also more likely to hold visitors' attention if they don't look text heavy and are succinct and easy to read.

Adapted from an article by Barbara Woods, James Cook University; barbara.woods@jcu.edu.au

A

The Stinging Tree

Although the serrated, heart shaped leaves and fleshy red berries of the Stinging Tree often remind people of a raspberry bush, don't be tempted. Stay well clear!

Found primarily in the rainforest, the Stinging Tree has a dense covering of fine glass-like hairs on all exposed parts of the plant. If accidentally brushed against, the hairs break off and lodge in the skin. These hairs release a chemical which can cause a throbbing pain that can last many months.

Historical records show that animals are equally susceptible to the virulent poison produced by the hollow hairs of the Stinging Tree. Early settlers tell of horses being driven to self-destruction as a result of coming into contact with the plant.

✗ **Stinging Tree**
Dendrocnide moroides

B

The Stinging Tree

The Stinging Tree is dangerous

The serrated, heart shaped leaves and fleshy red berries of the Stinging Tree often remind people of a raspberry bush.

This Stinging Tree is not a raspberry bush.

The Stinging Tree has a dense covering of fine glass-like hairs on all exposed parts of the plant.

If accidentally brushed against, the hairs break off and lodge in the skin. These hairs release a chemical which can cause a throbbing pain that can last many months.

Historical records show that animals are equally susceptible to the virulent poison produced by the hollow hairs of the Stinging Tree. Early settlers tell of horses being driven to self-destruction as a result of coming into contact with the plant.

The Stinging Tree is found primarily in the rainforest.

Stay well clear!

✗ **Stinging Tree**
Dendrocnide moroides

C

The Stinging Tree

Watch out - this bush bites!

This innocent looking bush may look like a raspberry bush, with heart shaped leaves and fleshy red berries.

Don't be fooled!

The innocent looks hide a dangerous weapon – the fine glass like hairs which contain a nasty poison.

If you touch a Stinging Tree, these fine hairs will lodge in your skin and the poison will cause an intense throbbing pain which can last for months.

Even horses have been driven to self-destruction after touching a stinging tree.

Watch out for Stinging Trees as you walk through the rainforest. If you see one, stay well clear!

✓ **Stinging Tree**
Dendrocnide moroides

D

The Stinging Tree

As you walk through the rainforest watch out for a bush know as the Stinging Tree. This plant looks similar to a raspberry bush, but with heart shaped leaves and fleshy red berries. Don't be fooled! This bush bites!

The innocent looking Stinging Tree has a painful weapon. Look closely and you will notice the bush has a dense covering of fine glass-like hairs. If you touch a Stinging Tree, these fine hairs will lodge in your skin and the poison will cause an intense throbbing pain which can last for months!

Even horses have been driven to self-destruction from the pain caused by touching a Stinging Tree. So watch out for the Stinging Tree and if you see one, stay well clear!

✗ **Stinging Tree**
Dendrocnide moroides

Future editions

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

news and events

****Stop Press Diary Date****

Scotching the Myth

Interpreting Scotland in the 21st Century

April 3rd & 4th, 2002

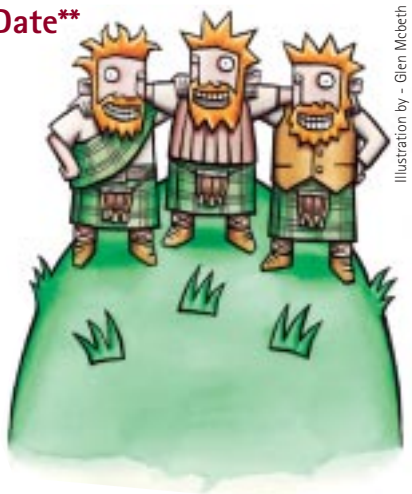


Illustration by - Glen Mcbeth

Interpret Scotland and the Scottish Interpretation Network are pleased to announce a joint Scottish interpretation conference, to be held at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh in April. This event will be an opportunity to meet and learn at first hand from some of the best interpreters in Scotland. Sam Ham, author of *Environmental Interpretation: A Practical Guide for People with Big Ideas and Small Budgets* will be guest speaker. The programme contains practical workshops, plenary discussions and a 'Question Time' style debate. Site visits and an evening function are planned for April 3rd, with the main event on the 4th. The fee for both days is £65.00. Programme details and a booking form will be circulated shortly – if you want to register interest, please contact **scotchingthemyth@snh.gov.uk or telephone 01738 444177 ext 240.**

A **trade exhibition** will also take place at the conference. If you are interested in exhibiting your company's services, please contact David Masters at **dd.masters@virgin.net**

Evaluation Research

Scottish Natural Heritage has recently commissioned some visitor surveys to assess the effectiveness of the interpretation provision at six visitor centres where SNH has been one of the primary funding bodies. We are also evaluating our new range of National Nature Reserve publications to assess public attitudes towards the format and content. A report of the findings should be available next summer.

Contact Julie Forrest for details, 01738 444177.

James Carter

Knockan Crag opens

A major new geology interpretation facility has opened at Knockan Crag in Wester Ross. Knockan is well known in geology circles for the 'Moine Thrust', a feature that gave rise to the first theories of how the earth's crust moves. The interpretation features art works and an exhibition, with visitors encouraged to explore the site themselves through a trail. It is hoped Knockan Crag will become a significant attraction in the area, and stimulate greater interest in geology.

Reviews

A Closer Look: Increasing access through interpretation

Scottish Museums Council (in association with Interpret Scotland) (2001)
16pp handbook, Free on request

This new publication makes a compelling case for better interpretation in museums. Well written and clearly designed, it explains in outline the interpretive planning process and offers basic advice on implementation and evaluation. Although it is aimed at museum staff with little knowledge of interpretation, it is relevant to a much wider readership, and will remind more experienced interpreters of why they work in this field. Available from the Scottish Museums Council, Tel 0131 229 7465, **inform@scottishmuseums.org.uk, www.scottishmuseums.org.uk**

Events

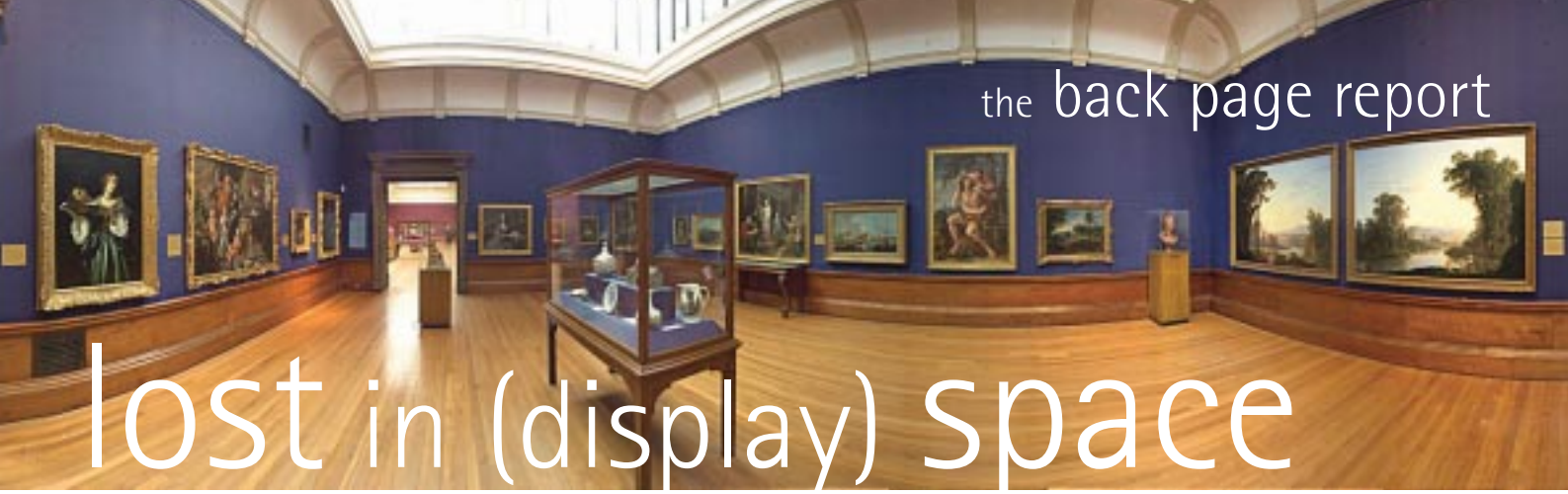
Environmental Interpretation
Countryside Council for Wales / CEI Associates
15 – 19 October 2001
Plas Tan y Bwlch, Snowdonia. £330
Contact: Plas Tan y Bwlch, Tel 01766 590324

Working with Words
Interpret Scotland / James Carter
13 November 2001
Battleby, Perth. £50
Contact: Eilidh Strang, Scottish Natural Heritage, Tel 01738 444177

Organising programmes of guided walks and events
Losehill Hall / Yvonne Hosker Training and Advice Service
26 – 27 November 2001
Losehill Hall, Derbyshire. £230
Contact: Losehill Hall, Tel 01433 620373

Scottish Tourist Guides Association Training Course
The next intake for guide training leading to the Blue Badge takes place in March 2002, with interviews taking place in January 2002. The course is run by the University of Edinburgh for the Scottish Tourist Guides Association and is part time over two years. Much of the course is available through distance learning, weekends and summer schools.
Contact Scottish Tourist Guides Association, Tel 01786 447784, info@stga.co.uk

Discovering Scotland
A series of study tours illustrating the best of Scotland's scenery, geology, history and architecture, organised by the Centre for Continuing Education of the University of Edinburgh in conjunction with the Scottish Tourist Guides Association. The course fee includes a workbook, and a CD ROM is also available for each tour for £10.
Perth, Inverness - Great Glen 13th & 14th October 2001 - £100 (including accommodation)
Dundee & Fife 3rd November 2001 - £30
Edinburgh & the Lothians 16th & 17th February 2002 - £55
Bookings to CCE, University of Edinburgh, Tel 0131 650 4400, email cce@ed.ac.uk



lost in (display) space

Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

Improving access to museums and collections is one of the modern mantras of the museum professional. Whilst this includes making display furniture more physically accessible, and using appropriate content, design and media, helping visitors to easily find their way around is often overlooked. Simply finding the way to the toilet can be a challenge in some museums and heritage attractions! The reason for this may be because visitor orientation is the responsibility of different staff – marketing officers, curators, display designers, and architects – and therefore lacks cohesion.

Take five focus groups and three advisory panels...

The Kelvingrove New Century Project is a £25.5 M scheme to refurbish the Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove, and improving access is one of our central aims.

> "Simply finding the way to the toilet can be a challenge in some museums"

To inform improvements, Glasgow Museums embarked on the largest visitor research and consultation exercise in its history. We established numerous quantitative surveys, five focus groups and three advisory panels. One of the main findings of this consultation was that finding the way around the building was difficult, and the layout of displays confusing. Both getting from A to B was difficult, and visitors could not understand why gallery A was next to gallery Z. As with many older museums, the arrangement of displays had grown up out of custom and practice. For example, there was no specific reason why the archaeology gallery was next to the musical collection, but without clear delineation of the displays and signage, visitors assumed that there might be.

...add some visitor tracking...

We commissioned the Architecture Department of Cardiff University to assess how people use and move around Kelvingrove. This involved tracking visitors around the building and observing visitor flow patterns. Three results were of particular significance:

- Kelvingrove was originally designed so visitors could complete a circuit of galleries around each of the side courts. However, over the years some routes have become blocked, and visitors have to make detours to move from one gallery to the next.

Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

- Most people who went upstairs did not notice (or ignored) the large staircases either side of the two main entrances and the poorly placed lift. Instead, visitors went upstairs using the staircases well inside the building.
- Only around 25% of visitors bothered to go upstairs at all.

To tackle this, we now plan to clear staff offices and non-public spaces to restore the original gallery routes. New stairs and large capacity public lifts will also be sited in the central hall, one of the busiest spaces in the building.

Part of the reason why so few visitors go up to the first floor is it contains mostly painting galleries. From the research we know that many visitors are not interested in art, and for those that are there is little provision for families or children. Our solution is to re-locate some of the art to the lower floor, and to broaden the definition to include all forms of artistic expression, media and non-Western art. To aid visitor orientation, one wing of the building will be devoted to 'Expressive Arts' displays and the other wing to 'People and the Environment' displays.

...finish with a dash of retail therapy...

It also occurred to us that large museums share orientation problems with department stores: visitors (or customers) enter the building with either specific items of interest in mind, or simply to browse. A variety of ways to improve orientation and visitor flow were suggested by a retail management specialist, and have been adopted by the project:

> "large museums share orientation problems with department stores"

- The most important place for orienting and welcoming visitors is the 'de-compression zone' – the foyer area. It has to be clear of displays, bright, welcoming, and provide detailed orientation information.
- Make popular displays, the café and shop easily accessible, but also site some popular displays in places that will draw people past other less popular ones.
- Consider large 'iconic objects/displays' for orientation on all floors.
- Make sure that display titles are meaningful to visitors.
- Use floor surfaces to guide people with colour, texture and signs (even projected signs), as most people in northern climates look down.
- Think about the placement of signs. After floor level, eye level is the next most important orientation height for people (and remember the movement of eyes is from left to right and in a fairly narrow band).

Et voila!

A comprehensive orientation brief has now been produced for the Kelvingrove New Century Project, summarising the specific ways to help visitors find their way to and around the museum. It will be implemented over the next four years.

Lawrence Fitzgerald, Project Officer, Kelvingrove New Century Project
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