INTERPRETATION

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text **Gill Binks**

photography **Keith Paisley**

'Looking at the mundane through fresh eyes' 'Skedaddle' by Alan Franklin, one of the pieces in the Kielder Partnership's major public art programme.

A Common Language

IN THIS issue of the journal, following the successful conference in the North East on Public Art and Interpretation, we look at recent projects where artists have played a key role in helping to interpret cultural and natural landscapes.

Since the early days of art and landscape projects pioneered by Common Ground, working with artists in all media has become much more commonplace for countryside managers and rural community workers. Similarly, there has been a strong revival of interest in using art and artists in the process of urban regeneration, environmental improvement and community development. On the whole it is a story of success and enrichment and, amongst interpreters at least, a growing understanding and appreciation of the role that artists and art can play in their work.

James Carter's article based on his study for Scottish Natural Heritage is a valuable review of current art and landscape projects and points up useful guidelines for working with artists in this context. Other articles highlight issues that need to be addressed if the process of working together is to be effective and satisfying.

Eileen Adams gives us an overview of the role and current scope of public art. Its merits and significance are discussed and often hotly disputed in the art world and in the popular media, as the reception of The Angel of the North in Gateshead recently demonstrated. Sensational, dramatic pieces put places on the map, and become a focus for public pride, affection and sometimes derision. Elsewhere, pepperings of perhaps less controversial pieces contribute to environmental improvement schemes and economic regeneration strategies and aspire to be icons for local people and visitors, reminders of unseen or forgotten history and habitats, adding for good or ill to a sense of place. Some inspired pieces, for example Andy Goldsworthy's sheepfold project, bring new meaning and significance to places, as do many sensitive monuments. In other places 'artwork' has appeared like a rash, at best decorative and interesting, at worst a forlorn, neglected intrusion.

The Forestry Commission pioneered sculpture trails in the landscape in the early 1980s in parts of Grizedale Forest in the Lake District and the Forest of Dean. Wonderfully organic, evocative pieces transformed visitors' experience of dull woodland, creating a new sense of place and drawing in many new visitors. Kielder Forest is currently undergoing a similar makeover with 'art for tourism's sake'.

Aaron Lawton explains how a project in Bennachie Forest set out to be definitely not 'another sculpture trail', and uses creative writing and sculpture together to 'offer welcome, mystery, surprise, delight or humour as well as understanding'.

Lynda Burns' account of using sculpture to interpret an old Maori settlement site highlights the dilemma of whether there is too much 'art' and not enough interpretation. Few of the sculpted plaques communicated the significance of the site to the visitors she interviewed. Too many 'art in the environment' projects, in common with many interpretation projects, go forward without any evaluation of visitors' reactions. Making an artistic statement is one thing, hoping that statement will resonate with visitors, and enhance their enjoyment and understanding of a place and its history, is something else!

The Eden Benchmarks project seeks to focus visitors' views of and

'Viewpoints' by Tania Kovats plays with tourists' perceptions of landscape around Kileder.

on the landscape. The project officer felt very strongly that he did not want a set of banal interpretive panels intervening between visitors and their view, so commissioned sculptors to create somewhere to sit with a clear view and a different sense of place. But may the sculpture at the head of Mallerstang, however striking and beautiful, still appear to many as an unnecessary intervention at that marvellous place?

Peter Milner's account shows how a multi-faceted arts approach to interpretation and design helped create an interesting, attractive walking trail along the River Parrett, involving local communities and local artists in its planning and development. Getting community consensus on using or placing art in the landscape is often a fraught process. Peter Milner hints at difficulties in developing the Parrett Trail and declined to elaborate on these in his article! The Arcadia Project in Surrey was initially derailed by adverse reaction from local people thinking, mistakenly, that its aim was to establish a sculpture trail in their country park.

However, there are many projects that seek to raise awareness of local heritage and environment using arts approaches to encourage people to explore issues and express their understanding for themselves. Where the main focus is the process rather than the end product, these projects are usually very successful.

Aaron Lawton extols the essential qualities of 'people we call artists' who 'devote their lives to looking at the mundane through fresh eyes...delve deeply under the surface of ideas and their meanings...conjure precious objects from base materials and their imagination,...who insist on poking and prodding at our emotions and spirits as well as our intellect'. In the Surrey Hills landscape assessment artists were included in the team for the different 'perceptions' these qualities would bring to the process. They expressed frustration at the formal, technical assessment process the landscape team had to complete but their contributions significantly influenced the outcome.

The interview with Helen and Newton Harrison reveals some of the tensions in understanding the interventionist role some environmental artists take on, and its relationship with the work of professional environmental managers. Getting new insights and messages across to people who are best placed to act must be an essential part of the process of evolving and presenting the finished artwork if it is to have significant impact.

For the most part interpreters should be in the business of collaborating with artists rather than simply commissioning them. Finding a common language and starting point is essential. We must avoid the assumption that 'artists' have the monopoly on insight and perception and thus give up too much responsibility ourselves, and we must make sure that their need for freedom of expression does not make them prima donnas in the process. We need to be confident of our brief and the desired outcome, to involve them in the development of the brief and to steer an evolving project. We need to find artists who will co-operate in that process without feeling that their art is being compromised. The experience described here suggests that there are artists who can and want to be good team players, and that the process of working together brings many rewards.

Gill Binks is now a freelance consultant. She was formerly a director of the Centre for Environmental Interpretation and of CEI Associates Ltd.

text **Peter Milner**

photography **Bill de la Hey**

Claire Wilks weaving one of four living willow cones which mark the entrance from the trail to Stoke St Gregory, centre of the Somerset willow growing and basket making industry. Each year the willow sprouts and Claire returns to the area to trim and weave the cones as well as run public workshops.

Art in its rightful place

THE River Parrett Trail follows this river from its source in the hills of the Somerset and Dorset borders across the Somerset Levels and Moors to the sea. It has sculpture along its route, as well as a number of bridges, stiles and gates made by craftspeople, but it is not a sculpture trail.

Experience from other sculpture trails shows that the feet of enthusiastic visitors can soon turn such places into a sea of mud – and the River Parrett Trail passes through some of England's most fragile landscape.

The project team decided early on that the focus of the trail should be the landscape and not the art. An important centre of balance, which asks the arts to be relevant, congruous and informing but not the star of the show.

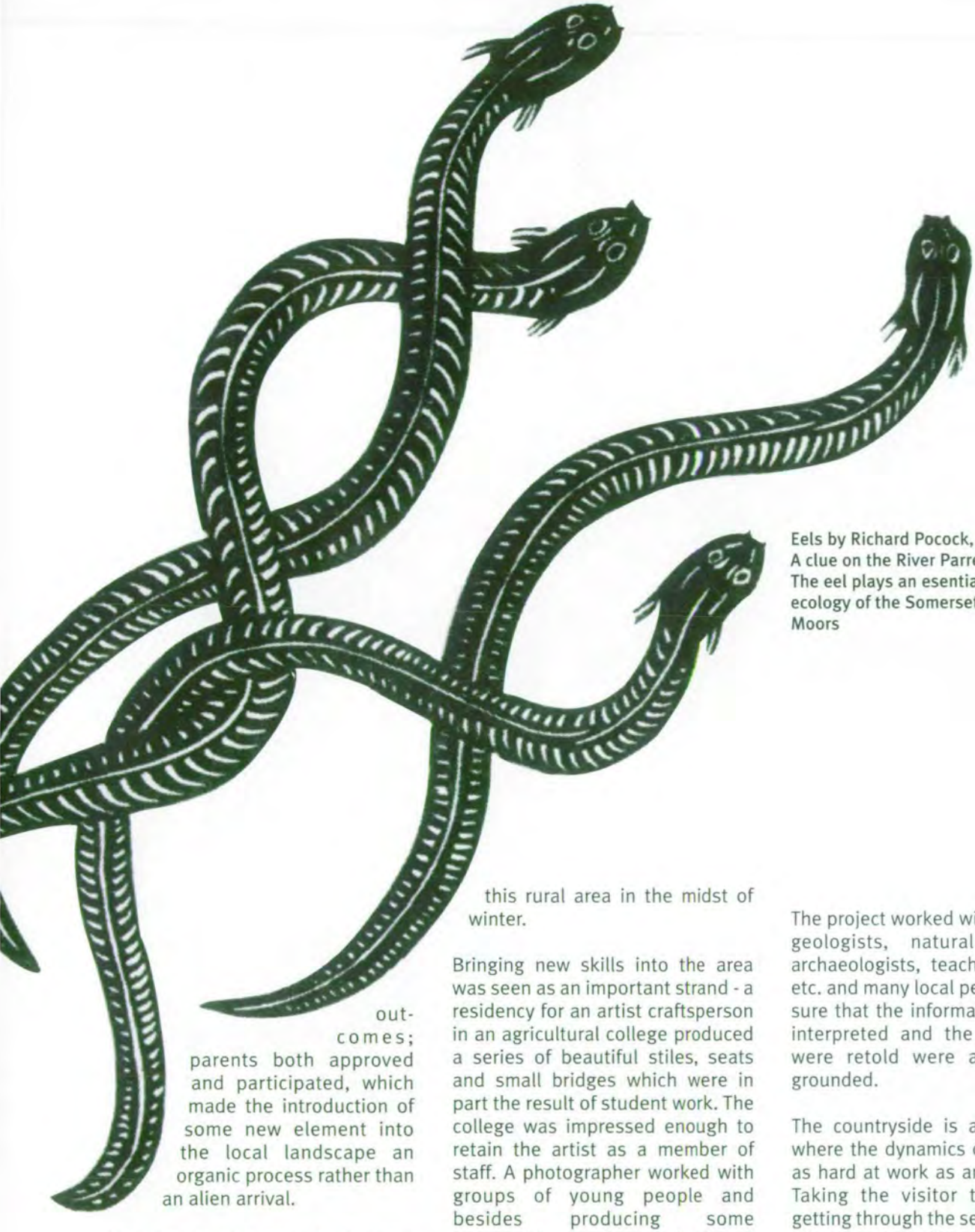
It was also decided that this project should use (not exclusively) artists from the localities of the trail and the region - perceiving that the local arts communities should be viewed as a creative resource that also represented the region.

Besides the physical trail the project wanted to use the arts in the production of the main publication of the project, the guide, commissioning 'clue' images which illustrated some of the main themes and stories of the river landscape. These existed as small plaques on the trail as well as illustrations in the guide and proved to be invaluable in many other ways.

It was also seen that in order to be successful this project would need to involve and be of benefit to the local residential and working communities of the localities through which it passed. Artists worked with the communities and particularly in schools to explore and animate areas and aspects of the local landscape.

The trail crosses four district council areas and has as its partners a wide range of bodies representing conservation and the environment, the arts and tourism. It gained the bulk of its funding from the European Life Fund for being a sustainable tourism project - bringing the benefits of visitor spending to rural communities without the pressures that might despoil the landscapes. With such a delicate balancing point and so many partners it sometimes proved difficult to steer a course through rivalries and conflicting interests.

But working at community level and particularly in schools the process was often at its most creative and rewarding. Children thoroughly enjoyed having new people coming into their schools introducing new skills with unusual



Eels by Richard Pocock,
A clue on the River Parrett Trail,
The eel plays an esential role in the ecology of the Somerset Levels and Moors

outcomes; parents both approved and participated, which made the introduction of some new element into the local landscape an organic process rather than an alien arrival.

The project also organised a programme of public walks, talks, events and workshops that revolved around exploration of the landscape, for which there was a constant appetite. A history day on the navigation of the river had people queuing round the block. 'Weave a living willow chair to plant in your garden' attracted a vast national response which has developed into a series of very successful weaving weekends that bring people from all over the country to this rural area in the midst of winter.

Bringing new skills into the area was seen as an important strand - a residency for an artist craftsperson in an agricultural college produced a series of beautiful stiles, seats and small bridges which were in part the result of student work. The college was impressed enough to retain the artist as a member of staff. A photographer worked with groups of young people and besides producing some memorable images introduced digital technology which allowed young people to manipulate commercial imagery instead of being manipulated by it.

Besides visual artists the project worked with writers, musicians and performers; as a result the project span off several other publications - a book of poetry and photographs, the republishing of a novel, and two CDs, one of folk music and another of new music.

The project worked with historians, geologists, natural historians, archaeologists, teachers, farmers, etc. and many local people to make sure that the information that was interpreted and the stories that were retold were at least well grounded.

The countryside is a living place where the dynamics of change are as hard at work as anywhere else. Taking the visitor to the grain, getting through the sentimental fog of some pundits as well as wrapping it in a package that the tourism industry can handle is tough work. If you would like to sample some of the fruits of these labours you can order the guide by calling 01935 462504. You can also ask for the Journal which gives more information about the process. But better still, take a walk down the River Parrett Trail.•

Peter Milner is the co-ordinator for the River Parrett Trail project.

Clues in the ground

TODAY there is a small public park on Mangere Mountain, a grass covered volcanic cone in the middle of suburban Auckland. Four hundred years ago it was the site of one of the largest Polynesian cities in the South Pacific. The Maori community, a large, complex Neolithic society, prospered here for over 600 years. Garden mounds, storage pits, garden walls and terracing for dwellings now remain as earthworks hidden under grass.

Six sculptures, designed as visual clues on a self-guiding trail set around the mountain's crater rim interpret this intriguing landscape to today's visitors. Cast in iron or carved from local volcanic stone, they mark significant places and activities in the life of the people who lived here. They were developed together with education programmes on the mountain, through a partnership of Wai-O-Hua, a Maori Community Trust; the local authority managing the site; and the Department of Conservation.

The interpretive planner envisaged cast metal plaques with simple text and single images. In working with the sculptor these became three-dimensional pieces, and words were discarded so visitors could define meaning in the sculptures for themselves.

Visitors may come across large sunken pits in the hillside, once storage pits for root crops. At one of these are piles of three of the crops, cast in iron. Another sculpture depicts the mounds built around the kumara (sweet potato) gardens - the heaped rocks retained heat and moisture and so extended the growing season. Elsewhere a line carved in a stone replicates the silhouette of the defensive terraces, perhaps the most subtle interpretation on the trail.

• A mixed response

So how well do the sculptures work in interpreting the site? Responses to a small visitor survey in July highlight problems with visitors reading into the sculptures what the interpretive team had hoped.

Some sculptures are too subtle: many visitors failed to notice the defence site sculpture, although their route took them past it. Responses ranged from fascination to disinterest; few realised that the sculptures explained something about the site. Some wanted to learn what they were about, some were frustrated at not understanding them, others liked the mystery. Their understanding of what the sculptures were actually designed to convey was limited. Comments included:

'I've seen them all - wouldn't know what they were. It would be good to have some words to help understand.'

'I like the fact that there were no words- everybody was discussing it and coming up with different ideas.'

'It was like hieroglyphics. We touched it – it felt lovely'

Whilst recognising the integrity with which the project was planned and implemented, this raises many issues, not least the interpreter's responsibility to the client to ensure their messages are communicated effectively. But then few people stop long enough to read text on the most skilfully designed panel. These sculptures are durable, aesthetically pleasing, and do act as a stimulus for many visitors. Importantly, they are much appreciated by the Maori elders, who use them as props for personal interpretation on their guided walks.

Two panels will soon be installed on the mountain to provide conventional interpretation of the site's history. Over time we hope the sculptures will be seen as part of the landscape, markers and clues in the growing understanding of Mangere Mountain.•

Lynda Burns teaches in the Human Science Division, Lincoln University, New Zealand. For further information contact burnsl@lincoln.ac.nz, or Michelle Edge (the interpretation planner) at edgem@waitakere.govt.nz

One of the trail sculptures, embedded into a bank just below a midden. These rubbish heaps yielded bones and shells from the fish and birds eaten here 400 years ago.

text **Aaron Lawton**

If you go down to the woods today...

CONSERVING wildlife and plants... supplying timber for Britain... journey of discovery... responsible management... exploring the living forest... pine marten, red squirrel, crested tit... forest design plan... renewable resource. Another forest – another forest interpretive panel.

How can we tell a story told so many times before and yet keep it fresh for our visitors? One idea is to work with people who devote their lives to looking at the mundane through fresh eyes; people who delve deeply under the surface of ideas and their meanings; people who conjure precious objects from base materials and their imagination; people who insist on poking and prodding at our emotions and spirits as well as our intellect; in short – people we call artists.

The tumbling of waters is the teeming of life
Artist **Mary Bourne**

This was the approach taken by the Forestry Commission for the interpretation of Bennachie Forest in north east Scotland. An interpretive plan recommended interpreting the forest, but doing so through unusual means. The objective would not be to provide visitors with the answers to all their questions through lengthy texts which many would not read, but to find some better way of provoking thought, inspiration and a real sense of discovery.

• Not Another Sculpture Trail

It was decided to combine very short pieces of creative writing with visual and tactile forest sculptures to raise awareness of important issues within the forest. It was hoped that writing and sculpture would work together to appeal to a broader range of visitors than might respond to purely textual or purely visual information.

From the beginning it was agreed that we did not want a forest sculpture trail. Sculpture trails seemed more suited to less interesting forests where artistic works can happily become the primary attraction. The forest on the hill of Bennachie has variety, interest and history in its own right. For this reason it was decided that the sculptures should not be 'landmark' pieces, but should be more subtle interventions into the landscape. In association with textual allusions they would allow a real sense of discovery and would serve to focus enlightened attention onto the surrounding woodland.

Projects have a habit of taking on a life of their own after the initial brief is written, and about two thirds of the works stuck closely to this underlying principle. For the others, the artists creatively stretched the boundaries of the brief and produced some 'in your face' feature pieces that create powerful focal points in the forest.

The client for the Bennachie project was Forest Enterprise. Interpretive planning and creative writing was by Touchstone Heritage Management Consultants. Interpretive arts administration was by Aaron Lawton Associates. Sculptors: Christopher Bailey, Mary Bourne and Jonathan Claxton.•

Aaron Lawton is an interpreter and designer specialising in the enhancement of local identity through site specific interpretation and the sensitive introduction of artefacts into the local environment. He can be contacted on 01796 482468.

Creative management

In working with creative people, the selection and briefing of the contractor is the most important part of the process – working with artists is no exception. In this case the client and the interpretive planner decided to work with a professional interpreter with experience of arts administration to manage the sculpture project from beginning to end.

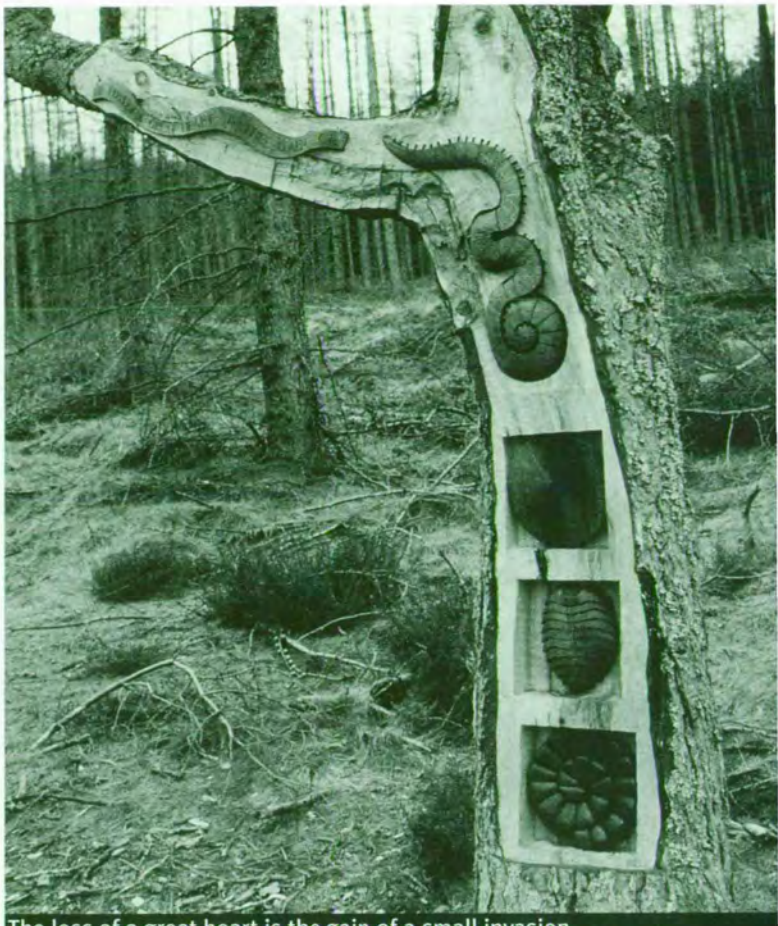
A shortlist of suitable artists was put together based upon the submission of photographs of previous work by a wide range of environmental artists. A comprehensive project brief was drawn up which specified the client's objectives for the project, whilst allowing freedom of expression in how the artists satisfied those objectives and worked with the passages of creative writing.

...use products of the local landscape as sculptural materials...

Whilst commissioning all of the shortlisted artists to produce designs before the final selection would have given the client a clearer idea of the end result, it was felt that it would also fix the designs at too early a stage in the project and further dent the already modest budget. As it was, three artists were chosen from the shortlist and commissioned to produce designs for twelve sculptures.

Managing interpretive art projects is a fascinating process. Much of the time is spent as an advocate and fixer working equally on behalf of the client needing to achieve their organisational objectives, and the artist with their interest in creativity, personal expression and artistic integrity. Somehow the end result has to satisfy both parties and the whole process has to be at least positive, and preferably enjoyable, for all concerned.

Some artists are temperamentally suited to working within the constraints of a brief and still producing creatively satisfying work. Other artists are used to following their own star and find the constraints and compromises of team working a real challenge. Either way, the project manager needs to be an unusual breed equally at home with organisations, politics and committees as they are with creative processes, sketch books and chisels. The potential for pear shaped pieces is always present, but almost always worth the risk because when interpretive art works well, there is little that can match it.•



The loss of a great heart is the gain of a small invasion
Artist **Chris Bailey**

The felling of the timber is the making of the home
Artists **Chris Bailey & Jonathan Claxton**

text **Eileen Adams**
photography **Eileen Adams**

Whispering or shouting – just what is Public Art?

PUBLIC Art is notoriously ill-defined. Sara Selwood (1995) lists a number of descriptions, which include 'sculpture in the open air' and 'art in public places'. It may be owned by the community, thought it can be located in private places. It can be permanent, static, and object-based. But it can also be temporary and ephemeral, performance or time-based, and can involve artists working with craftspeople and designers in a variety of contexts, in the community, in residencies, fellowships and exchanges.

Public Art has been taken out of the gallery and into the streets. You can contemplate it while waiting for a bus or a train. You can bump into it on your way to Marks and Spencer. You can sit on it, stand on it, walk on it and touch it. You cannot escape it.

Public Art is changing our view of what art is and what it does. It can create a different perspective on our view of heritage. Public Art enables us to view the everyday, even banal environment with a fresh eye, rendering the ordinary extraordinary.

• Functions

Public Art has been a factor in urban regeneration and landscape renewal. It has enhanced local identity and contributed to the development of a sense of place. It has been used to improve environmental quality, to upgrade and animate public spaces and as embellishment and decoration. It can symbolise civic pride and create a corporate image.

It has been claimed that Public Art is a cultural investment, vital to the economic recovery of many cities, attracting companies, adding to land values, creating employment. It is said to contribute to local distinctiveness and create a sense of regional identity, encouraging the development of cultural tourism. Claims have been made that it can increase the use of open spaces, reduce wear and tear on buildings and reduce levels of vandalism by encouraging a sense of pride and ownership. (Adams 1997)

• Heritage, Identity, Interpretation

These claims have particular relevance for the heritage and tourist industries. Where there have been attempts to create or reinforce a regional identity, some public art projects have dealt with the interpretation of the countryside, while others have sought to develop a sense of place through emphasising associations with writers or artists, or revealing hidden histories of those who lived and worked there. Public Art has been a key strategy in developing cultural tourism. By providing 'themed experiences' in the country park as alternative 'cultural destinations' for family outings, Public Art has been packaged as another element in the leisure industry, an alternative to the sports centre or the home improvement warehouse.

But there are perhaps more important aspects and longer-term considerations we should recognise. An important link between Public Art, heritage and identity is the monument. It is perhaps the most familiar form of Public Art, an art form accepted and readily understood. The monument is an important symbol of collective memory, a focus for celebration and an expression of civic pride.

In creating monuments, who or what do we choose to remember? Whose heritage is celebrated? Is it that of the ruling or warrior class in our statues of statesmen and generals? Is the working class seen as an anonymous man in monuments to 'the glorious dead' or unidentified as 'the unknown soldier'?

Castles, cathedrals and country houses are monuments to the lives of the military, the clergy and the aristocracy. Rachel Whiteread's 'House' created an eloquent monument to the space inhabited by working class families. What space do they occupy in the culture or the collective memory? And where do images of women feature in all this? Are they still to be confined to the role of mother or the allegorical figure of peace, plenty or justice?
We learn language through hearing and talking, through exposure, engagement and practice. It enables us to make sense of our world. Just as we use different modes of discourse in spoken and written language to communicate our understandings and opinions, Public Art speaks to us in a variety of ways. It might be in a softly spoken manner, a whisper, a subtle hint to focus on the landscape and be aware of the forms and textures of the land, as evident in the work of Mary Bourne in Cumbria. Or it might be loud, in your face and self-

'Hanging Fire' by Cornelia Parker, Forest of Dean. A sculptural element in the landscape, creating surprise and drama.

important, like Anthony Gormley's 'Angel of the North' in Gateshead. It might form a narrative, like the work of Colin Wilbourne in Sunderland. Or it might merge with the urban fabric, improving aesthetic and design quality, creating a kind of 'tonal' quality or introducing a regional accent, such as the glass commissions in public libraries in Sunderland, organised by Matthew Jarratt.

• Change

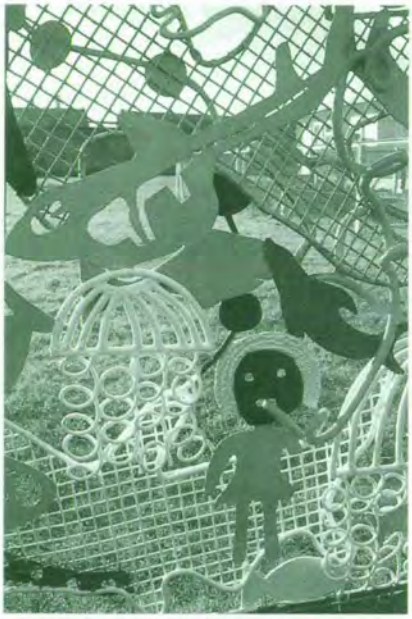
Public Art is not concerned only with issues of identity and heritage, who we are and what we were. It also provides opportunities to consider what might be and can point to the future as well as the past.

Through making their practice visible and accessible, artists working in the public domain have enabled people to engage with ideas, develop attitudes and team skills which will enable them to deal with the experience of change. These include a preparedness to deal with unexpected outcomes and welcome the experience of 'creative failure', which turns mistakes or disappointments into achievement.

• Roles and relationships

In Public Art, the artist is obliged to adopt a number of roles, many of them played out within the same project. They have sought financial support as applicants and supplicants, and have had to learn the skills of the bureaucrat, filling in forms and attending meetings. As entrepreneurs or catalysts, they have had to make things happen. They have had to engage in marketing and public relations.

Just as the role of the artist in Public Art is a multi-facetted one, our view of the public need not be confined to the role of 'audience', 'consumer', or 'viewer'. Members of the public have acted as patrons, commissioners, critics, advisers and co-workers. In many instances, they have taken an active part in initiating



School gates (detail) by Glen Eastman and children from Pembroke Street Estate, Plymouth. Gates, railings, pillars and bollards were created by artists, craftsmen and children working in collaboration.

opportunities for art projects, generating and developing ideas, in creating local interest and popular support and in organising community involvement. In some instances, such as the St. Peter's Riverside Project in Sunderland, they have taken responsibility for interpretation. In some cases, they have appropriated the work of artists to create temporary and ephemeral pieces, either by placing traffic cones on a conveniently placed equestrian statue or a football 'shirt' on the 'Angel of the North'. More usually, they act as collaborators, as in Pembroke Street Estate in Plymouth, where residents worked with artists to improve the aesthetic and design qualities of places where people live and work. (Adams and Ingham, 1998)

Some of the issues which arise from the changing relationships between artists and public focus on questions of ownership and control. Artists are reluctant to relinquish control as they fear the involvement of non-professionals will compromise the quality of the art work or the overall design. By making the process of art visible and accessible, they see the danger that the mystery will be destroyed and the special union which the artist brings to the work will be lost.

The tensions are creative ones. Public Art requires artists to adopt new ways of working, to extend the role of the artist and to redefine the function of art in society. We, the public, need to see ourselves as more active players in the scene, able to influence the appearance, feel and meaning of our towns and cities. We need to recognise the value of art, not as artefacts, but as a way of seeing the world, understanding our heritage, as a means of creating cultural identity and as a way of visualising possibilities for change and making them real.•

Eileen Adams is a consultant working on links between art, design and environmental education. She was director of the research project Learning through Landscapes, and is currently a Research Fellow at Bretton Hall University College.

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text **Gillian Binks**

Creative teamwork

In May 1998 the Countryside Commission published the most recent of its AONB landscape assessments, for the Surrey Hills AONB*. Landscape assessment methodology has tended to be based on analysis by landscape type (geology, land use habitats etc). For this one, however, our brief as the consultant team was to consider the character of the landscape, and specifically to explore the cultural associations and perceptions, both historic and contemporary, of the Surrey Hills, as the basis for devising landscape management policies.

The 'hills' of the North Downs and Wealden Greensands of Surrey, the first real countryside south of London, have been desirable places for grand country houses for centuries, and for the more modest villas of commuters once the railway arrived. They also attract huge numbers of day visitors. Many writers, poets and painters lived and worked here. Inspired by the vernacular architecture and the varied landscape of the area, the Arts and Crafts houses and gardens designed by Edwin Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll spread 'the Surrey Style' worldwide. These images, with those of Helen Allingham and E. M. Forster, often present a romantic view of the Surrey Hills which belies the poverty of its rural past, the continuing pressure for development and the often conflicting pressures of recreation and conservation.

To help the CEI team of landscape architects, historical geographer and interpretive planner, we secured an Arts Council grant for seven artists to join us. Working with Vicki Berger of Arts Project Management, we devised the brief and selected two photographers, Roger Polley and Simon Read, two writers and poets, Stephen Plaice and Sandra Stevens, two mixed media artists, Ian Whittlesea and Tommy Wolseley, and painter Pip Woolf to work with us for a week. They were simply asked to take on board the aims of the 'perception' project and to respond to the landscape of the Surrey Hills in whatever way they felt, presenting this as a 'workbook' or record rather than as a complete piece of work.

Some work focused on an **aesthetic response,** with a visual or written piece. This often brought to light intimate and complex details missed in the technical, broad-brush landscape architect's approach. They celebrated features usually recognised as problems rather than assets - the colour, texture and patterns of eroded footpaths, the sculptural forms of the trappings of 'horseyculture', the visual and social interest of graffiti. Some of their observations encouraged us to suggest reassessment of some countryside management policies, and strengthened recommendations on others. For example, accepting and continuing the practice of sympathetic 'gardening' and ornamentation in this 'wild',

Sunken Lanes, a characteristic feature of the Wealden Greensand, in a sketch by Pip Woolf

managed landscape; the importance of restoring and maintaining views framed by trees; the value of opening up hidden stretches of river banks.

Many responses were based on an understanding of what they saw in the landscape not in visual or topographical terms but in socio-political, historic and economic terms. They highlighted the problem about what this landscape represented. There were strong images of wealthy residents with a semi-rural, quasi-suburban lifestyle requiring an idealised, tidy countryside to satisfy their need for the rural idyll. Yet this is not a working countryside, but landscape as backdrop with little

A Framed View
by Pip Woolf

connection to the rural Surrey people who once worked the land and lived in the villages.

Their insights expressed as poems, essays and in pithy visual images encapsulate the issues so effectively. Whilst not attempting to offer solutions, they make readily accessible the contradictions and the implications of the complex social, economic and political factors which impact on the AONB landscape, and in a much more effective way than a report would.

The published report contains only a few examples of the artists' work. The recently appointed AONB Officer for the Surrey Hills is currently putting together a touring exhibition of their work to raise awareness of the issues and interest in the aims of his project.

Including artists in our team was an experiment and we were cautious in predicting the outcome. Had we realised what an impressive amount of work they would produce and how much they would have to say that was of value to the process and the issues, we would have arranged a much bigger audience for their final presentation. Their contributions provide a very useful starting point for public discussion and participation. Had the budget been available, we could have used their work as the stimulus for a public perception exercise. The artists' input was a far cry from public art in the countryside, but as an exercise in interpretation we all felt it informed the landscape assessment process and enriched it immensely. Try adding artists to your team when planning your next interpretation project! •

***The Surrey Hills Landscape.**
CCP 530.
Countryside Commission 1998

For more information on this project contact Gillian Binks or John Dyke, c/o 0161 445 6452. Email: gillbinks@compuserve.com

text **James Carter**

photography **James Carter**

Where does this adventure go to?

'The Arts' have become a widely accepted part of interpretation work. Most projects that use sculptures, creative writing or storytelling to build links between visitors and a place do so because arts work is seen as a way to encourage an instinctive and emotional response to a place, rather than to communicate facts. This is partly a reaction to the tendency for early interpretation only to present facts, but it also reflects a growing understanding that if interpretation is to encourage a conservation ethic, this must grow from emotional attachment and commitment, as well as from academic understanding. It is of course possible for conventional media to achieve this. Good guided walk leaders have always known that their trade is a performance art, and played on the emotions of their audience. But there are not as many of them as we might wish, and even fewer copy writers with the talent, or vision from their client, to produce exhibitions that move audiences to tears or laughter.

In any arts-based interpretation project, two rather different agendas are involved. On the one hand, conservation or heritage organisations may see the arts as just one vehicle amongst many for their communications and publicity work. That work may have quite specific objectives in terms of the messages and ideas the organisation would like to promote. On the other hand, artists and arts agencies may see environmental and heritage resources as purely a venue or subject for their work, work which is concerned more with exploring ideas, with challenging accepted perceptions and experimenting with materials, all without any fixed end.

There is clearly a potential conflict of interests here. Some projects have left interpreters feeling that their essential messages are getting lost in a sea of uncertain ideas, while the artists involved chafe at what they see as a restrictive brief. Other projects give artists free rein, but fail to take account of the real complexities and issues of heritage management.

• Made for Success

There are three key elements in projects that are both exciting and rewarding for commissioning organisation, the artist and, most importantly, the audience.

• The brief for the project must be clear, and it must set out a clear rationale for artistic work. If projects are to serve specific communication aims, but also truly capitalise on the contribution that artists can make, then the brief is best evolved from a dialogue between artist and commissioning organisation. A good brief allows freedom for the artist to develop ideas as they see fit, while being clear what the aims of the project are.

• It is vital to choose the right artist. Their ways of working, style of work, and personality must all be matched with the project, client organisation and site. The best way to do this is to choose artists through a process of limited, rather than open, competition. This usually involves a considerable investment of time and effort in research, and in discussing the project with a short list of possible candidates.

Sir Eduardo Paolozzi's enigmatic early people at the Museum of Scotland are far more than display cases for prehistoric jewellery.

• The success of many projects relies on a sensitive facilitator or agent. This is not essential, though anyone wanting to manage projects themselves would do well to start with small ventures. But a good facilitator can bring a lot to a project, through helping to develop

Art work that encourages a response to the environment can be both playful and ephemeral. David Kemp's Scale Green Bird Man, a hideaway in Grizedale Forest, is no more. But for those who explored its eccentric delights, it lives as a treasured memory.

the brief, bringing in other partners, drawing up contractual agreements and working with both artist and client to ensure that both understand their roles in the project.

• Challenges all round

This field still offers challenges to practice in both arts and interpretation. Any arts work that is intended to communicate specific messages, or to encourage a particular response, raises issues concerning artists' freedom of expression. These can be resolved through a sensitive, clear brief, and where work has been evaluated, there is evidence that arts projects do indeed move their audience to new insights and new attachments to a place. But the messages a visitor takes from an art work are far more difficult to define than with an exhibition panel or guided tour. Interpreters who work with the arts must be willing to accept a more diffuse agenda in their communications. This can be a positive asset: at the entrance to the 'Early Peoples' galleries in the new Museum of Scotland, figures by Sir Eduardo Paolozzi incorporate display cases for prehistoric jewellery. The sculptures make the ancient jewellery personal, but they are mysterious. Prehistoric people were human as we are; but we can never know exactly what they were like, or what they believed. Our images of them are as much a reflection of our own concerns and myth making as of the reality of their time. The sculptures express this enigmatic relationship more eloquently than any exhibition text could do.

Another issue is the role of challenging or provocative work. The audience for arts work presented as part of a museum's display, or on site, has not necessarily chosen to look at art. In this context, some commentators suggest that arts work needs to be 'discreet'. Certainly where art is to be a permanent feature in a landscape, those involved need to consider how to present challenges in ways that are appropriate to its setting.

But to argue for discretion at all times would be wrong for both the arts and interpretation. It is part of art's function to be bold, to challenge, sometimes to shock; meaningful interpretation should surely aspire to the same goals. Arts work as part of an interpretation project is not simply another communication medium with clear objectives and known outcomes: it is an adventure. And good adventures have two essential characteristics. You never quite know where they are going to take you, and they leave all their adventurers with a different view of the world than they had when they started.•

James Carter works as a consultant in communication, interpretation and training. He can be contacted on 0131 317 3360. This article is based partly on a review for Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Arts Council of arts and the natural heritage (J Carter and D Masters, authors; SNH review no. 109, 1998). The report is available for £3 from SNH Publications Section, telephone 01738 627921.

text **Helen Mayer & Newton Harrison**

A dragon over the hills

CALIFORNIA based environmental artists of repute, Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison presented their first proposal for England last summer. Commissioned by artstranspennine98, the flyer for their exhibition describes 'Casting a Green Net' as 'a conceptual design for making the Transpennine area of Northern England increasingly self-sustaining, permitting bio-diversity and cultural diversity to co-evolve across the Pennines to each other's advantage'.

The artists present their ideas by re-working Ordnance Survey maps so that the 55,000 miles of road recede and rivers, mountains, ecological reserves and urban patterns are accentuated. The form created by the boundaries of their net 'emerges as an awkward, strangely shaped dragon in flight, with a lake for its eye. Its head is at Hull ... Its tail is slightly curled at the estuary of the Mersey, while the Pennine Parks are seen as wings.'

Fighting scepticism with the zeal of a potential convert seeking proof, Gill Binks, helped by Peter Townsend, interviewed the Harrisons when they visited Losehill Hall in the summer. The following are edited extracts from the interview.

The issues 'Casting a green net' addresses are issues which planners wrestle with all the time. What do you think you contribute to the process of analysis and debate that makes it different?

Right now, the forces of the market, and people's belief systems about what landscapes should look like independent of what they might need, are leading to a universe where culture becomes a kind of mono-culture. So we take a look at what you have got and we ask ourselves questions. You put your questions to us in terms of 'planning', 'contribution', 'problem solving', bottom- line stuff. I am really not interested in that although our work has some of those attributes at the end of the process of doing, thinking, behaving and being.

We are probably visionaries in that we are story-tellers. We believe every place is busy telling the story of its own becoming. We come to a place only when invited and join in the conversation. Our work is the story of our responses.

We were initially invited to work on a Liverpool - Leeds urban transect. No urban transect we ever saw in 30 years worked, so we offered a work that linked the estuaries of the Mersey at Liverpool and the Humber at Hull. Helen said 'Imagine that we are a giant standing in the Mersey estuary, casting a giant fishing net right across Northern England, until it reaches the Humber estuary. The net has magical properties, only landing in places where bio-diversity could or needed to happen, had happened, or already was happening'. So the work 'Casting a Green Net' began.

To test such a net we travelled the area and talked to many people. As we worked, we felt something wrong was happening on the Pennines, the back-bone of England. The M62 was becoming a strip of development that would be totally un-crossable and ecologically divide the Pennines. The development between Manchester and Leeds might very well break the back of England.

In putting down your net, have you done what an ecologist would do, throw down a quadrat to see what is going on in it?

It is more a psychological act that calls a community together to think about it. It is the ecological community and the human communities together that the green net is about. It is not quadrat thinking like an ecologist would do although that is part of the end game of the work.

Do you think the net and dragon image is one which actually provides a more effective framework for people to think about the sorts of issues you are talking about?

We make no claim about more effective and less effective. We are story-tellers and we make drawings. In the shape of our Net an amazing dragon form jumps out at you, a great friendly dragon. So that becomes an image, a coherent

'Every couple of hundred years Europe redoes its landscape, so why shouldn't we?'

thing. Professor John Hanley, working on an EU Trans Pennine planning study, saw our dragon form and thought it a much more sensible area than his study area. His region, economically and politically determined, is too large. Our area is determined by the story of place, cultural and ecological boundaries. It is not a new region; we have made what we call a stability domain.

Who are you writing the story for?

Our story is of interest a priori, it is continuous creativity and improvisation in the name of the co-evolution of bio-diversity and cultural diversity. We do it for our own pleasure and interest. We don't have 'targeted' audiences. The audiences are the people who invited us. They bring people to hear us, so they are our audience also. We talk to many people as we learn about their place, so our audience grows. Some people will be interested; a lot of people won't. Those who listen maybe change their thinking a little and influence other people. Many environmental artists were influenced by our innovative work in the 70s and they influence others. We are not obligated to bring every person in the world with us. We are making a work of art that has a voice.

What about biodiversity?

The English landscape is a cultural landscape. Who is speaking for the culture of biodiversity, the whole evolution of this planet, the niche system in a vast forest? Why are you asking me about valuing your beloved cultural landscape evolved in the last 500 years? Every couple of hundred years Europe redoes its landscape, so why shouldn't we? Landscapes aren't permanent. Are you suggesting that we shouldn't take a radical, or an odd approach to the evolution of landscape?

The dragon has five or six layers of meaning, like a novel or a complex mural. One is its own shape on the map, a big flying thing, with the Parks for wings. At another level it asks, how do we save the spine of England? The dragon's colours highlight the river systems and green spaces, show the linkages around the towns. It says, if we want to survive we can no longer pollute our river systems, we have to protect them and change our chemical industries. It says we challenge economic market forces. There could be a great green farm here - if 200 square kilometres of it went green it would be large enough to compete with inorganic, industrial farming elsewhere.

Our position on forestry will be unpopular but amusing. We make a movable forest on the map, show what a forest floor is like, what a tree farm is. We say most of the land was once like this, we need this much space for a forest, choose a place on the map to put it. We then fly the forest across country and try it in all sorts of places. So we introduce a new perspective on the forest discourse. In truth, we understand the real issue is economics. If you pay landowners and farmers enough, they will plant trees.

We introduce nothing alien here. But if you go back far enough this was all forest. So, at the eco-urban edge we make simple rules. Instead of infill, housing estates expand an existing edge on the countryside - you can't break a green space, violate a river or an estuary, go across fingers; at the eco - urban edge of new housing, leave a 50metre band to go into succession. That is all that we are saying.

How important is it to have a vision that can be described in a word like dragon or net?

Formidably important, it is the same value that any title has that bespeaks the power as a whole. All artists, all writers use it. War and Peace - how important is the title War and Peace? Come on!

Do people see the dragon and say, yes, I can see that vision too, I never thought of it in that way before, or do they say yes, but... ?

Everybody says 'yes, but...', that's the way we learn. People see different things in it depending on what they bring to it. We aim to spark a change in the direction of the conversation, we hope it continues and develops a life of its own. We set things in motion, we work with chance operations and indeterminacy. We have succeeded in some places, failed in others. We have no power, except the power of our idea. Our contracts say if you don't like us, tell us. We will go home.

text **Susan Cross**

IN OUR ISSUE OF FEBRUARY 1998, ON OUTDOOR INTERPRETIVE PANELS, WE PUBLISHED AN ARTICLE BY SUSAN CROSS ABOUT WRITING FOR PANELS. THE ARTICLE AS IT APPEARED DID NOT REFLECT THE LAYOUT ORIGINALLY INTENDED, SO WE ARE PLEASED TO REPUBLISH IT HERE.

The tip of the iceberg

PANELS are limited in what they can communicate. If a panel works well for the visitor it will probably be because of what it does NOT say. Most of the subject, and almost all its subtlety, will remain hidden from view. Here is an example: a panel on writing panels accompanied by the explanatory detail that is hopelessly inappropriate for a panel but ideal (I hope) for something that people will read at leisure.

WORDS THAT WORK *1*
penning pithy prose for panels *2, 3*

SIZE IS ALMOST EVERYTHING! *4*

How much do you want to read? *5*
Try counting words on panels and notice where you get bored. *6*
Two hundred *7* words *8* is enough for most people. *9*
(This panel has 163 words.) *10*

Is a picture worth a thousand words? *11* Debatable, but pictures do draw the eye ... to the caption.
Put an important message here.

FOUR STEPS TO SHORTER PANEL TEXT *12*

STEP ONE
Plan it carefully *13*
People often write too much because they don't know what they want to say. Try to state what your panel is about in one simple sentence. Then you can use another 180 words embellishing (but not repeating) *14* that message!

STEPS TWO, THREE AND FOUR
Edit, edit and edit.
Weed out the woffle. Delete the descriptions. Rub out the redundant and the repetitious. *15*

Your finished text should be:
- Active *16*
- Direct *17*
- Informal *18*
- It should use
  - Familiar words *19*
  - Simple sentences *20*
  - Illustrations *21*

1 Make sure they do. Every word needs to work hard to justify its place on your panel. There is no place here for make-weights or space fillers. Make your words work, so your visitor doesn't have to. This means that you will have to work on the words.

2 Titles are vital. By the time she's read this far your visitor will have decided whether or not she is going to read this panel. Put your main message into the title. This, of course, presupposes you know what that message is. I do: the rest of this panel, and this article, is about how to write briefly but with impact.

3 Alliteration almost always acts as an alchemy (but, as with alcohol, alternatives and almond essence, you can overdo it). There are other tricks you might try. I nearly added 'punning' to the list of p's because I like it, but not everyone does. I am really arguing here for a lightness of touch along with the punch.

4 Sub-titles are important. Your visitor will be scanning, not reading, your carefully crafted prose. Sub-headings help him to spot what he is interested in. Sub-titles are one way of dividing up the text. (And don't forget what Tilden said about the importance of provocation. Revelation comes later ... don't hold your breath.)

5 Involve your visitor. Ask questions. Give them something to think about. I think you are writing this panel because you can't lean on the wall all day talking to your visitors. Your panel has to do the leaning and talking for you. So let it talk like you - courteous, welcoming, friendly and human.

6 It is always a good idea for panel text to suggest things that visitors can do. Hopefully your panel will be about a more gripping subject than writing panels so you can find a more engaging activity for your happy punter. Examples might be 'count how many different sorts of butterfly you can see between here and there' or ' imagine what this place looked like in the dim and distant past before crisp packets'. Encourage the visitors to use all their senses.

7 We can debate whether I should have written 200, the more readable form, here. I didn't because it is at the beginning of the sentence and I went to school a long time ago. However, when I am writing for panels I break many of the rules I learnt back then. One sentence paragraphs can work a dream. Pithy phrases, that are not sentences, can have a place. I certainly write 'aren't', 'can't', and 'isn't'. And begin sentences with a conjunction. I just don't tell my English teacher.

8 Your assumption should be that people will not read everything you have written so highlight your main points to add impact. This is my main point. Two hundred words is a recommended maximum. I think 150 words is often better. (This, by the way is the revelation promised earlier - sorry if it's less than you'd hoped for, but that's life!)

9 Whatever you're writing about try to get people into it. You can do this by referring to individuals, using illustrations or photographs that include people, describing what people have done on the site or just evoking people as I have done here.

10 Try to highlight specific local examples to draw attention to the special qualities of this place and what you can see, smell or feel here.

11 Another question. What a stimulating and provocative panel! For the panel writer a picture can be worth a whole lot of words and for the visitor even more. Pictures are easier than words so, if you can, show it rather than say it.

12 Panels need designers who like working with words and their meaning as well as with colours, shapes and all that stuff.. Here's an idea for breaking up a heading which offers a designer something to play with.

13 More sub-headings. Once again, they break up the text and highlight the main points. You can see what this panel is about if you read only the bold text.

14 Here's an example of my breaking one of my rules (which just goes to show what I feel about rules). If you find yourself using brackets in a panel text it is worth asking whether the brackets contain secondary information. If so try deleting them, the panel can probably stand without them.

15 Like this sentence for example.

16 This means it will contain verbs. And verbs that act, not the sort that lie about passively. So do not write 'this site is being managed for three-toed sloths' but 'The Wildlife Trust manages this site for ...' . Many of us have been trained in scientific or bureaucratic writing which relies heavily on the passive. I remember spending ages in my first ever Chemistry lesson trying to describe how I lit a Bunsen burner without using the word 'I'. It took me some time to get to, 'The Bunsen burner was ignited ...' (I was obviously a good student. I was using unfamiliar Latinised words like 'ignited' rather than good old Anglo Saxon ones like 'lit'. See point 18 below). One of the reasons why passive verbs are so popular is that people can hide in them. But, as I pointed out earlier, interpretation needs people as well as action. It therefore needs active verbs.

17 Direct your text to the person reading it. Use the word 'you' ...

18 ... and write in a relaxed, conversational tone, ...

19 ... using words that are often used in speech. These may not be the ones that you are used to writing in formal reports. For instance, lots of panels begin with something along the lines of 'This reserve was purchased by Wetshire Naturalists in 1997', but when did you last go out to 'purchase' some fish and chips? There's an interesting little bit of history here. A lot of the more formal, bureaucratic words, (like 'purchase') have French or Latin roots and come from the language of the Roman and Norman ruling classes. These words tend to be longer than their short and brutish Anglo Saxon equivalents (like 'buy'). Consider (or 'think about') 'transport' and 'carry', 'observe' and 'see' and, of course, 'ignited' and 'lit'.

20 Another good reason for not using the wider reaches of your vocabulary on panels is that simple, familiar words are much easier for visitors whose first language is not English, or who have some difficulty with reading. Simple sentences also help. Compare and contrast the last two sentences to see what I mean.

Sentences can be simple without being short. It helps if you vary your sentence length to avoid the staccato style, reminiscent of early schoolbooks, which can feel patronising. The occasional very short sentence can have a lot of impact. Believe me.

21 I had added humour to the list but there just wasn't room for it. Editing text for panels can involve some painful cuts.•

Susan Cross would be a struggling poet if she wasn't a successful interpreter and scriptwriter. She is a partner in TellTale, a Buxton-based interpretive consultancy.
Telephone 01298 70376.

text **Peter Grant**

photography **Anni McCuaig**

The French Connection - Down Under
Actor Richard Davey, as French navigator François Peran, introduces Tasmanian Aboriginal woman Arra-Maida. The drama helped launch a new park in Tasmainia.

At the World's End

'THE world's end' is how French Admiral Bruni D'Entrecasteaux described the southern edge of Tasmania when he first sailed here just over 200 years ago. The remoteness of Tasmania - an apple-shaped, Sri Lanka-sized island adrift of mainland Australia's south-east - has kept large tracts of it as wild and untracked as it was before Europeans arrived.

Today around one third of Tasmania is protected within national parks and other reserves. But with a population of less than half a million, and an economy that depends on an uneasy mix of tourism, forestry and mining, the natural beauty of Tasmania is not always enough to ensure its protection.

The Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service (TPWS) has recently begun to formalise arts programmes as part of its broad conservation agenda. This is in part a recognition that 'the arts' can be a source of both support and funding for conserving natural and cultural features. It also acknowledges the less tangible influence of artworks on how people view the world.

In Tasmania's case the work of the late Peter Dombrovskis, a wilderness photographer, had a huge influence on local conservation campaigns. His photographs of the wild Franklin River adorned the walls of thousands of Australian homes and offices. Although his posters and calendars showed scenes most urban dwellers would never see in person, they communicated the idea and the ideal of wilderness. This translated into enough political power eventually to halt the damming of the river.

The TPWS is now exploring using arts of all kinds to celebrate and educate in unique ways. An informal system of artist residencies in Tasmania's national parks began a few years ago. TPWS staff and Arts Tasmania, the state government's art-funding body, soon recognised the potential for a full-fledged scheme that could benefit all parties. In 1999 Arts Tasmania and the Parks and Wildlife Service will offer six 'Wilderness Residencies' at remote sites around the state. The residencies, valued at A$7,500, are open to artists working in any art form. In addition 'The Premier's Dombrovskis Award', will offer a A$5,000 grant to an emerging wilderness photographer.

In late 1997 a weekend workshop for writers was held at Lake St Clair in Tasmania's central highlands. The Aboriginal name for the lake, Leeawuleena (meaning "Sleeping Water"), was echoed in the workshop title - "Writing Sleeping Water". Guest writers, funded through the Tasmanian Writers Centre, used the inspiring natural surroundings of the lake to lead participants in an exploration of writing in and about landscape, people and place.

Playwright and actor Richard Davey incoporates dramatic re-creations of convict days into the interpretation at the Strahan Wharf Centre, where he is joint manager, in Wild Rivers National Park. His performances are part guided walk, part dramatic monologue, but 100% effective interpretation.

Such events won't always have a direct educational aspect to them. But they are part of that broader rapprochement between the arts community and those who value and/or manage our natural areas. From an interpretive point of view, there is no doubt that arts-based programmes can offer new ways for visitors to our parks and reserves to appreciate their many values. I for one will not quickly forget the sight of Richard Davey plunging into the ice cold waters off Sarah Island as he demonstrates some of the finer points of convict ship-building. I might wish that all arts-based programmes would have a similarly bracing effect! •

Peter Grant is an Interpretation Officer with Tasmania's Parks and Wildlife Service. For further information contact Parks and Wildlife Service Tasmania, GPO Box 44A, Hobart, Tasmania 7001, Australia. e-mail: peterg@delm.tas.gov.au. Website: www.parks.tas.gov.au

Association for Heritage Interpretation

Encouraging excellence in the presentation and management of natural and cultural environments.

• The Asscociation provides a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas on the Interpretation of Heritage, both urban and rural;

• Disseminates knowledge of interpretive philosophy, principles and techniques;

• Promotes the role of interpretation and its value among those involved with recreation management, conservation, education, tourism and public relations in national and local government, charitable bodies and private organisations.

Interpretation is the process of communicating to people the significance of a place or object so that they enjoy it more, understand their heritage and environment better, and develop a positive attitude to conservation.

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Primrose Stone. Artist **Joss Smith**

Continued from **back cover**

The sculptures also have a function - as seats. But the emphasis is on sculpture which accommodates sitting, rather than sculptured seats. This is crucial from the interpreter's point of view, as the visual revelation of the sculptor's creative insight gives way to tactile interaction and, consequently, an uninterrupted view of the landscape through that invisible Zen window.

Cypher piece. Artist **Frances Pelly**

•Creative freedom

Working in partnership with the local Parish communities concerned, artists are selected by committees consisting of representatives from E.C.C.P., a visual arts expert, the County Arts Officer, the representatives of the Parish, District and County Councils and two or three local people. It is already a fundamental principle in the Project's strategy as countryside managers to work closely with local people. The trust and confidence we have gained over the years as part of the local community is providing a fertile base for developing 'Benchmarks'.

The artists' brief allows as much creative freedom as possible, within the parameters of making a site specific work which includes some liaison with local communities. Dialogue between the artists and local people is confined to that which informs the content of the sculptures rather than the form. We have sufficient faith in the unique interpretive power of art, and in the artists' ability to address our needs as landscape interpreters, to allow the art its own voice to our mutual advantage.

Each artist works in residence for six weeks and we provide accommodation and workshop space in the area concerned. This enables the sculptors to get a feel of the place and formulate their ideas by talking to people about the history or associations of the site. Early in each residency a public meeting provides a forum for exploratory discussion. Visits to the artist's workshop are encouraged.

There is, of course, a psychological method behind all this political correctness which draws upon the natural curiosity that people have about how things are made. Seeing the sculptor, a fellow human being, working hard and demonstrating skills helps to demystify the creative act. It helps to make the end product, which might otherwise have been dismissed out of hand, more accessible and enjoyable.•

Dick Capel is the Countryside Officer with East Cumbria Countryside Project. Seven sculptures have been commissioned and installed along the River Eden so far. For more information telephone 01228 561601.

text **Dick Capel**

A view through a clear window

Water Cut. Artist **Mary Bourne**

A COMPREHENSIVE guided walks programme and a series of circular walk booklets have been the mainstay of the East Cumbria Countryside Project's interpretation work. But both these approaches tend to prioritise the acquisition of knowledge. Far too little consideration is given to the aesthetic dimension, which is such a significant part of most people's perception of the natural environment. Zen Buddhism teaches that the name of an object is like a pane of dirty glass between the object and the viewer. I would suggest the ultimate challenge for the countryside interpreter is to provide a window which is not only clean but invisible.

Sue Clifford of Common Ground refers to our
'ethical relations with nature, our ancient understandings of the land which lead us to revalue our emotional engagement with places and all they mean to us. In its search to reassert the importance of liberating our subjective response to the world about us Common Ground has turned for philosophical help to artists' who wear their emotions on their sleeve.'

East Cumbria Countryside Project is also increasingly involving artists in its work, and I am convinced that art can provide a powerful vehicle for countryside interpretation. Artists are, after all, interpreters by definition. By making site-specific art which is a physical distillation of his or her own subjective response to a place, an artist can act as a mediator in other people's relationship with the environment.

• Sculpture with a view

The Eden Valley hosts numerous man made stone features from the past, encapsulating ancient reflections on life and eternity. Who is to say that Long Meg and her Daughters, an ancient stone circle, was not conceived by some Neolithic Andy Goldsworthy? It seems to me that the twentieth century has produced very few such features in the countryside of comparable substance or quality, to give our moment in history permanent visual expression for current and future generations to enjoy. The designation of Visual Arts Year UK in 1996 presented the ideal opportunity to help redress the balance.

With funding from the National Lottery through the Arts Council of England, Northern Arts, Eden District Council, Eden Arts, English Nature, The Environment Agency and The Foundation for Sport and the Arts, we are commissioning a dispersed collection of ten site specific, small scale, carved stone sculptures in the Eden Valley. They aim to celebrate and foster a contemporary sense of place, local identity and vitality. Each by a different sculptor, they are being installed at strategic locations beside public paths along the length of the River Eden between its source above Mallerstang and its estuary north west of Carlisle.

The sculptures also have a function - as seats. But the emphasis is on sculpture which accommodates sitting, rather than sculptured seats. This is crucial from the interpreter's point of view, as the visual revelation of the sculptor's creative insight gives way to tactile interaction and, consequently, an uninterrupted view of the landscape through that invisible Zen window.

Continued on page **twenty three**