

Blaenavon Partnership

Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site

Visitor Experience and Interpretation Plan



May 2007

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Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank all the members of the World Heritage Site Partnership, other stakeholders and the many citizens of the Blaenavon area for their help in creating this Visitor Experience and Interpretation Plan. Thanks are also owed to colleagues in the University of Aberystwyth, in Michigan, Virginia and Wisconsin, USA, and in Waterloo and Toronto, Canada, for their input into the technical issues involved in writing Visitor Experience Plans and managing rural heritage sites.

The Vision of Blaenavon is of a small town with a sustainable economy based on the sensitive exploitation of a cultural heritage resource of World significance.....where people wish to live and invest, attracted by the quality and character of an historic town, set in a unique landscape.

Blaenavon World Heritage Site Management Plan

If we do not honour our past, we lose our future

If we destroy our roots, we cannot grow

Hundertwasser, c. 1980, Austrian Artist, Activist and Architect

Heritage is not history...Heritage is, rather, curated and conserved, possessed and performed....it is realised in material objects, such as works of art or craft, tools and buildings, sites, special places and even whole landscapes, or else it is performed in speech or dress, in ritual, ceremony, dance or song....The test of heritage is its authenticity: through it the present touches the past

Denis Cosgrove, Alexander von Humboldt Professor of Geography, University of California, 2003

The prospect of loss haunts heritage

Robert Shannon Peckham, Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, 2003

Awareness of locality...brings past, present and future into evolutionary dialogue.

H.J. Fleure, Professor of Geography, University of Manchester, 1935

The past (should) link up with the present to provide a strong foundation and a healthy environment for the future of their people, and so to show clearly the unity of all life and of all human activity, yesterday, to-day and tomorrow.

Iorwerth Peate, Poet, Scholar and Founding Director of the National Folk Museum of Wales

Heritage Tourism allows us to travel through both space and time

The Chairman, The West Country Tourist Board, 1989

Executive Summary

This document comprises an outline Visitor Experience Plan and a detailed Interpretation Plan, linked to the Visitor Experience Plan, for the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site.

The Visitor Experience Plan (VEP) introduces the eleven key characteristics of the World Heritage Site (WHS) and lists the progress made in recent years towards its regeneration and development as a visitor destination. The current visitor product is outlined, and its reliance on the Big Pit National Coal Museum is noted. The visitor market is reviewed with special emphasis on the dominance of the day visitor market from within a 90 minute travel radius. Visitation is put into the context of national and regional tourism trends, policies and strategies. The challenges that the WHS faces are then assessed. Key challenges include the special nature of World Heritage Sites as visitor attractions, their concomitant special needs, and the tendency for most WHSs to reach a plateau in visitor numbers after a surge following designation and early improvements. The aims of the VEP are defined as creating a Sustainable Visitor Destination, capable of supporting the conservation of the site and the life of local and regional communities. From that premise flow the challenges of increasing and better distributing visitor numbers, achieving higher quality standards, diversifying and segmenting the product and how best to respond to rising competition and evolving new trends in tourism management.

Section 2 of the VEP explains the origins and purposes of VEPs in general and their framework role in guiding product development, interpretation, infrastructure work and marketing policies and practice. The processes of planning for the pre-visit, visit, post visit and repeat visit phases of visitation are discussed.

Section 3 of the Plan puts forward ways to make the visitor experience broader, deeper, greener and more market responsive. A Four Experience / Two Season approach is advocated. The Heritage Experience remains central and should be deepened and made more attractive. The Interpretation Plan is a key part of the development process to improve the attractiveness of the central product. Heritage is supplemented and complemented by three newly defined but related experiences: an Outdoor Experience, an Events Experience and an "Other side of the Mountain" Experience. This four experience approach is closely linked to the flexible Interpretation Plan that follows. Together, the WHS is made attractive to new market segments, and especially to the fast growing life style and aspirational markets. Suggestions are made for improving quality standards, and improving marketing, to support the pre-visit and post-visit/repeat visit aspects of the overall visitor experience. The need for overnight accommodation is seen as being satisfied in the short term by better use of accommodation in the Abergavenny area, with accommodation in Blaenavon itself developing at a later stage of market development.

The final section of the VEP – Section 4, the Action Plan – examines the issues which surround the creation of a management structure to implement the Visitor Experience Plan, and at the macro-scale, how to implement the linked Interpretation Plan and other future management plans. It also discusses how to find funding for the proposals in both Plans. This section has been informed by stakeholder consultations, the principles of sustainable tourism and the experiences of heritage destinations and World Heritage Sites in Britain and worldwide. Two ways forward are offered. The first, a variation of current working practices, is seen as offering small scale and short term implementation of the VEP and Interpretation Plans. The second, a radical change, could attract much more funding, deliver the aims of the VEP more quickly and thoroughly, and mark out the WHS as a leader in Heritage Tourism Management. It is, however, as radical as a management concept as the concepts

that made Blaenavon a leader in the industrial world in the past. Just as in iron and steel industries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this second “new” way forward in visitation management would require considerable entrepreneurial and political courage.

The Interpretation Plan establishes the principles, policies and aims for interpretation, appraises the existing interpretive resources, develops themes and storylines and makes recommendations on the mechanisms and media that will be most appropriate for the site. Its appraisal of resources, Section 5, lists the physical, social and intellectual elements of the landscape and its story which can provide the basis for interpretation. It also describes the facilities and services that offer opportunities for interpretation and for encouraging people to visit the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape. These include the town centre with its range of attractions and facilities, the car parks and picnic sites where interpretation can encourage wider visiting, the events and activities that take place in the area and can, in themselves, contribute to the telling of the stories. The facilities also include the Brecon Beacons National Park which is a major recreation and tourism draw.

Section 6 of the plan appraises the existing interpretive media, recognising that much has been achieved already in interpreting the industrial and natural elements of the area. Existing media include the main draw for the area, the Big Pit National Coal Museum with its exhibitions and guided tours, the displays and tours at the Blaenavon Ironworks, the guided walks and activities run throughout the area by Torfaen Borough Council and the National Park, the many publications and interpretive panels available to visitors, the electronic media being developed for the town centre and the Ironworks and the forthcoming displays and interpretation at the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre. Our aim in this plan is to develop and expand the approach already in use, take advantage of some of the existing characterisation and to maintain a visual consistency to strengthen the ‘Blaenavon Brand’.

In Section 7 the Interpretation Plan reviews the principal audiences for interpretation. They comprise family groups, adults (single, in pairs or small groups), adult groups, educational groups and adults with special interests related to the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape. Within these groups local people have as important a place as visitors from outside the area. The principal target group is the family.

Section 8 of the plan lays out the strategic approach to interpreting the World Heritage Site. Our overall approach is that the stories should be told through the medium of people, real or generic, past and present. The main elements of our strategy are the interpretive philosophy which underpins the strategy, the interpretive themes which guide the form of the strategy and the topics and mechanisms which give direction to the actions. Our philosophy is based on three ‘worlds’ – **geographic worlds**, of Blaenavon, the South Wales region and the World; **commercial worlds**, of investors, customers and the community; and **working worlds**, of land surface, underground and the wider environment. This approach gives structure to the complexity of the resources and the stories about them. We then develop storylines under three strands – **industry and trade**, **people and community** and **landform and wildlife**. Each of these strands will most effectively be delivered through people – those whose endeavours transformed the area and achieved its commercial success. Characters can ‘converse’ and related their stories through a variety of channels – **story hosts**, a present day real person; **story posts**, a real or representational character in conversation; and **story posts**, a visual, aural or electronic feature.

We then develop in Section 9 the themes and storylines above with the key elements of the stories and a selection of characters that could be used to convey them. We also propose the topics that each character would explain, in different media. The characters have been selected from those used in the forthcoming World Heritage Centre and from other sources. The use of the WHC characters will help to make connections between the WHC and other features in the Blaenavon area including the wider landscape. A variety of media are suggested to convey the stories including printed material and graphic panels, websites,

tours and audio presentations, educational materials, and events programmes. Sample texts are included to illustrate how the stories could be developed.

The final Section is an Action Plan for interpretation which provides our recommendations for each of the key interpretive media. These include an **interpretive map** leaflet for the WHS, a series of **story ghost leaflets**, a **guidebook** for the whole area, a series of **graphic panels** at selected locations, the development of smaller **story posts** and the further development of **websites** and **electronic media**. We strongly recommend the continuation and development of **guided tours** and of a variety of events and activities that will help to bring the area alive.

Introduction

The Blaenavon area is one of the best surviving examples in the world of a landscape and its artefacts that was created by industrial development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was one of the major centres in the industrial revolution in Britain and for a while led the world in technology and industrial innovation. For over a century the area was quarried and scarred to extract the raw materials for iron making, which supported the radical transformation of Britain's, and the world's, economy during the eighteenth century. Coal mining supported these activities. In recognition of its importance the area – known as the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape after its principal settlement – was designated as a World Heritage Site in November 2000.

This Visitor Experience and associated Interpretation Plan, which was commissioned by the Blaenavon Partnership from Red Kite Environment and Touchstone Heritage Management Consultants, provides recommendations that would help enhance the experience of all visitors to the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape through improved visitor access management and effective interpretation.

The Plan consists of two sections:

- Section 1 The Visitor Experience Plan
 - Visitor Experience Action Plan
- Section 2 The Interpretation Plan
 - Interpretation Action Plan

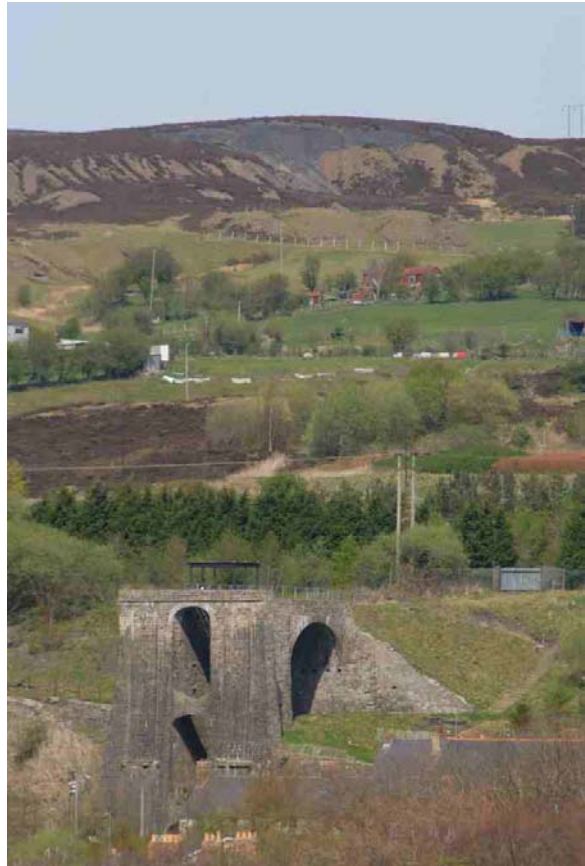


View over Blorengé RKE

Section 1 Visitor Experience Plan

1 Introduction

The Visitor Experience Plan is an appraisal of what the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape currently offers visitors in terms of experience and quality, an assessment of the visitor market and a review of opportunities for enhancing the visitor experience in the future. It also examines issues of changing market forces, new management techniques and changing opportunities, all of which bear upon both the Visitor Experience Plan and the associated Interpretation Plan.



Blaenavon Ironworks RKE

1.1 The place

The Blaenavon Industrial Landscape has the following eleven key characteristics which subsume many more specific elements that combine to make it worthy of World Heritage Site status. They are:

- it is unique, partly by definition, but specifically because of its now iconic status as a prime exemplar of a very early industrial landscape created by and for the industrial revolution;
- it has no direct comparisons in the world although many other countries have sites that resemble or echo some aspects of it;
- it is a surviving microcosm of the formerly widespread industrial landscape of South Wales, and as such preserves the essence of the relationship between a valley head community and its landscape.
- it represents a formative period of social and cultural history as well as industrial history;
- it was the centre of an economic driving force which contributed substantially to Britain's pre-eminence as an industrial and imperial power;
- it demonstrates a fascinating interplay of geology, geomorphology, industrial development and society and settlement patterns;
- it was a centre for technological innovation, closely associated with the work of Sidney Gilchrist Thomas, responsible for major developments in iron and steel making practice.
- it demonstrates semi-natural habitats, ancient landscapes, the irrevocable changes to the natural environment but also evidence of recovery; it is a graphic example of an ongoing process of landscape evolution.

- its origins, development and achievements are an evocation of human invention and endeavour;
- its legacy, despite a long period of decline and even neglect, is now stabilised and presented to a world-wide audience;
- it is now a place of resort, a tourism and recreational destination in direct contrast with its long years as a highly productive, but also destructive, working landscape.

1.2 Progress

The designation of the World Heritage Site ushered in a new era for the Blaenavon area. Over the last six years there has been considerable progress in moving towards the regeneration of the area, its presentation as a site for visitation and its administration by a range of diverse stakeholders. Developments include:

- The creation of the Blaenavon Heritage Partnership, meeting regularly and implementing improvements to the site.
- The resurgence of visitor numbers at the Big Pit, the main anchor attraction at the Blaenavon World Heritage Site.
- The researching and writing of a Marketing Plan.
- The development of a distinctive logo and articulation of a World Heritage Site brand.
- A range of signposting schemes, including brown signs, WHS Logos on main road entries into the site, and pedestrian signs within Blaenavon town.
- The transformation of a range of Car Parks across the site to create Gateways to the landscape
- Works to assist the operation of the Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway
- The development of the World Heritage Site Centre at St Peter's



Visitors to Big Pit National Coal Museum RKE

- The regeneration of the Main Street of Blaenavon, leading to the emergence of new services and niche market retail outlets.
- The development of a Ranger Service with Volunteer Participation for the rural parts of the World Heritage Site. Interpretive Walks Programme provided.
- Developments at Blaenavon Ironworks, to upgrade the site including interpretation of the houses, the opening of a Tourist Information Centre, the restoration of the buildings, Water Balance Tower and perimeter / setting
- Upgrading of the Gilchrist Thomas Industrial Estate providing a much improved link between Big Pit and the Town
- Establishment of events such as World Heritage Day and Garn Lakes Country Fayre
- Creation of the Iron Mountain Trail which has become a popular route through the WHS linking many of the key historic features

1.3 The Current Product – What is now available for the Visitor

- The Big Pit National Coal Museum: a rare example of a deep (90 metres) coal mine open to the public with underground guided tours. Dating from c.1860 it has a modern heritage centre, a multi-media virtual gallery, blacksmith's shop and a shop and canteen. It is part of National Museum Wales and is open throughout the year.
- The Blaenavon Iron Works, built in 1789, and when built one of the largest iron works in the world. There are extensive ruined remains of blast furnaces, kilns, casting houses, a balancing tower and a series of well preserved workers' houses. The Sydney Gilchrist Thomas Obelisk commemorates his key role in the development of modern steel making. The iron works is in the care of CADW, with visitor services provided by Torfaen County Borough Council. The Iron Works houses the Blaenavon TIC. Both the site and the TIC are open from April to October.
- The Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway: This was the route of the London and North Western railway which entered Blaenavon from the north, a competitor for the industrial trade for the Great Western Railway which served the area from the south. It opened in 1869 and closed in 1980. It is now operated by volunteers on weekends and Bank Holidays in summer.
- The town of Blaenavon, including the Workmen's Hall and Institute, and a number of important churches and chapels. Blaenavon is now a town with a range of niche market retailers, including book and specialist food items.
- The World Heritage Site centre, to be opened later in 2007, giving an overview of the World Heritage Site, its history



Inside Blaenavon Ironworks RKE

and community.

- The Blaenavon Community Heritage and Cordell Museum, with the story of the novelist, Alexander Cordell, who describes life in nineteenth century South Wales through his best selling books.
- The wharfs and waters of the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal.
- A series of tramways and inclined planes leading around the landscape and to the Canal.
- A series of relict industrial landscapes on the high moor land above Blaenavon, and on the edge of the Vale of Usk.
- Numerous signed and marketed walking routes, many within the Brecon Beacons National Park.
- An landscape with outstanding wildlife interest (Four SSSI's, one Special Area of Conservation and two proposed Local Nature Reserves)



Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway *Torfaen CBC*

1.4 The Market for the Product

The market for the Blaenavon World Heritage Site product was accurately and well described in the Report on Marketing Policy¹ written by Torfaen County Borough Council. This Report's findings were confirmed by the South East Wales Visitor Survey, 2005 prepared for Capitol Regional Tourism, and by the small survey undertaken in early 2007 at Big Pit (Appendix 1).

The main visitor market lies in the 0-90 minute travel time area around Blaenavon. The great majority of the market travels by car, seeking a one day visit. That visit may be part of a longer stay by some visitors in South East Wales. The Big Pit dominates the market with nearly sixteen times more visitors than its nearest "rival", the Iron Works. Very few visitors visit Blaenavon Town.

The findings of the above report are echoed in Monmouthshire County Council's tourism strategy, which seeks to develop day visit and short stay tourism, looking especially at the Independent Explorer and Walking markets

The 90 minute time line and travel by car means that for longer distance visitors the M4 and M5 motorways are important channels for day visit travel, along with the Heads of the Valleys road. There some visitation from further afield. These visitors stay overnight, typically on short breaks in the Brecon Beacons National Park, Abergavenny, and Cardiff. Very few visitors staying overnight outside South East Wales visit the World Heritage Site.

The South East Wales area receives 35% of its visitors from South East Wales itself, 11% from other parts of Wales, 42% from other parts of the UK, and 12% from overseas. Visitors showed a broad span across social groups and age ranges. The market is influenced very strongly indeed by word of mouth recommendation – a powerful incentive to create a quality visitor experience. Repeat visits to most South East Wales destinations are very common, largely by people living within the 90 minute travel time zone.

The Wales Tourist Board (WTB) Cultural Tourism Strategy (2003) provides further market material which has informed this Visitor Experience Plan. Relatively few holiday trips (rather than day visits from home) are made to Wales solely to visit heritage sites – less than 10% of total heritage site visits are in this "specialised" sector. The majority of holiday visits to heritage sites in Wales are made as part of "multi-purpose" more general holidays. There is a strong bias towards social classes ABC1, and heritage sites are especially attractive to families with children and to the over 55s, the so-called empty nesters. For foreign visitors, (which form less than 10% of the Wales tourism market) heritage sites were found to be much more attractive to long haul English speaking visitors (e.g. Americans) than to European visitors. The total international market for heritage attractions in Wales is very small, and is dwarfed by the UK market. There was some disappointment amongst international visitors to Wales with aspects of the heritage resource.

Overall, the Visit Wales (formerly WTB) policy for all types of holiday visit is to seek to attract families and empty nesters to Wales, concentrating on the UK market, with attention also paid to the US, German and Dutch markets.

Since the Cultural Tourism Strategy was researched, visits to heritage site destinations across the UK display a number of important trends. The increasing supply of heritage attractions is tending to reduce visitor numbers to most individual heritage sites. Interactive and meaningful interpretation is becoming a valuable visitor marketing tool. Pricing and value is becoming a sensitive issue.

¹ Destination Blaenavon, Blaenavon Industrial Landscape Marketing Strategy, Torfaen County Borough Council, May 2003

In conclusion, given the fixed size of market, the World Heritage site must try harder to attract visitors given the competitive market. The main reason for visits to this part of Wales has been found to be landscape and scenery – not heritage. The importance of developing the landscape element of the visitor experience is therefore not to be under-estimated. The “pure” or specialised heritage market is quite small: the main market lies in people seeking an interesting broadly based day visit experience which may be linked to heritage but not totally tied to it.



Visitors to Keepers Pond RKE

1.5 Challenges

The list of achievements given above catalogues the important early stages of the work to establish the World Heritage Site as a visitor attraction. The Current Product list describes the opportunities available to the visitor. Together they are an impressive starting point to this discussion.

It is important at this stage to state that the Blaenavon World Heritage Site is very different to many other World Heritage Sites. It is a multi-faceted, multi-site experience. It is not like Ironbridge Gorge, where there is a powerful geographic and historical unity which makes appreciation of that site relatively easy, and where a single tangible item – the iron bridge – sums up the whole site. Equally, it is not an industrial museum, like Beamish in County Durham, where the whole industrial heritage ensemble is controlled and marshalled as an exhibit. And finally it is important to say that the whole concept of a World Heritage Site designation is essentially an intellectual one. It does not rely on the same market triggers as many other types of tourist destination – a warm climate, sea bathing, night life, fashionable cultural events, spectacular scenery etc. It is a very special visitor attraction requiring very special treatment and is therefore very challenging.

This Visitor Experience Plan seeks to take the Blaenavon Tourism story to a new stage in its evolution. While there has been much thought, investment and progress across the World

Heritage Site since 2000, there is now a case for re-appraisal. In part that reflects the accumulated experience of partnership members in helping to manage the site. In part it reflects changing market conditions, with growing and fierce competition for visitors across Wales and beyond, with new heritage and other attractions coming on stream in great numbers. In part it reflects a sense felt amongst the stakeholders that a “visitation plateau” has been reached. This issue is not peculiar to Blaenavon. Research suggests that most World Heritage Sites experience visitor surges after designation, but visitation then falls unless skilled product development and marketing takes place (Buckley, 2002, 2004, Hadrian’s Wall Heritage Ltd, 2006). There is a case, therefore, for new techniques to be applied to take the site forward, to get the most out of the World Heritage Site, to support itself, its communities and the wider region. Fortunately, there are now many new ideas about how to manage change, promote World Heritage Sites, work with visitors, and interpret the stories like Blaenavon to best effect for all concerned.

This Plan seeks therefore to help create a Sustainable Visitor Destination that can withstand the growing competition within the day visitor and short break tourism market, and deliver more to the community and towards its own conservation. It aims to do this by new management techniques, new product development and revised marketing. Questionnaire Survey work, interviews with stakeholders and field observation have helped ascertain the issues and challenges which need to be addressed to achieve this new destination status. (The results of the Questionnaire Survey will be found as Appendix One to this Report: more detailed comments on its findings are given later). These challenges can be briefly listed as follows:

- The Industrial Landscape is a large and complex area with interests that span many periods in history. The individual sites are disparate and there is sometimes only limited physical or interpreted connection between them.
- Big Pit National Coal Museum is the dominant facility and the most visited. It provides the major anchor to the site, and brings most people to the World Heritage Site (WHS) for the first time. The challenge is to bring visitors back to the WHS to see other features and attractions.
- Very few visitors to Big Pit realise how much there is to see and experience in the wider World Heritage Site. Equally, only a minority feel that they understand what a World Heritage Site is and why it is important and unique. (see Appendix One)
- The Iron Works receives relatively few visitors (c. 10,000 per year in comparison to Big Pit’s 158,000). Yet the Iron Works is the major historic feature of the site. Helping raise the profile of the Iron Works is a central challenge.
- The Ironworks and Big Pit are currently the main attractions in the area. The World Heritage Centre should become a new and important visitor facility when it opens later in 2007. The other facilities in the area have a lower profile and are currently more difficult to find and appreciate, particularly in winter. But there is great potential.
- Access and orientation are in places not always clear – signage is inconsistent and discontinuous.
- There are issues of transportation and parking. Bus services from Newport to Blaenavon are excellent. But links to Abergavenny by bus are effectively nil. Transport around the site is very limited for people who do not have a car.
- The site depends on day visitors. Longer stays would allow greater local economic benefits, reduce environmental impacts, would allow greater depth of discussion. Can longer stays be achieved? Where should accommodation facilities be sited ?

- The Visitor Experience and Interpretation Plan provides a basis for the development of a new holistic interpretation concept across the site, which should gradually bring together the existing interpretation systems. It needs to become a powerful product in its own right, helping people of all kinds to both enjoy and understand the Blaenavon story and stories.
- To date, much of the emphasis to visitation has been on the Blaenavon side of the WHS. Surveys show that very few visitors to that side of the site realise that there is both a Brecon Beacons National Park side to the site and a rich and complex Monmouthshire side with industrial and pastoral strengths. The Visitor Experience Plan must encourage repeat visits and broader audience participation by stressing the many experiences open to visitation to this area.
- Tourism management in Wales is changing. Blaenavon needs to react to the challenges and opportunities spelled out in Visit Wales' new strategy "Achieving Our Potential 2006-2013" with its call for distinctive branding, higher quality, easier access, physically and intellectually, better skills and stronger, more effective partnership working. The strategy seeks to make tourism more market responsive, innovative, sustainable and profitable.
- This Plan also seeks to raise the quality and image profile of the WHS, in part for marketing and commercial reasons, and in part because it seeks to obtain a Quality Rating for the WHS recognised by Visit Wales, as part of the image raising task.
- The Plan responds to market research and national marketing policies by developing landscape heritage visitor experiences and paying special attention to the needs of families and empty nesters, known to be the market sectors with most potential for the area.



View from Garndryys RKE

2 What are Visitor Experience Plans?

2.1 Visitor Experience Planning and visitor management

Visitor Experience Plans were pioneered in North America and are used as a visioning, educational, marketing, customer care and management tool for sites as diverse as the Grand Canyon and major art galleries. They are market responsive, site conservation and community responsive. They work with business and interpretation plans by recognising the central importance of holistic visitation planning. They help sites understand that decisions about choice of visitor experiences to be sought can help create an ethos for a site, business success or failure, and conservation success or failure. They are also a valuable tool for working with local communities. They can be key elements in the creation of sustainable tourism strategies. (US National Parks Service 1997)

In brief, the evolution of Visitor Experience Plans for Heritage Sites can be summarized as moving site management from the Conservation dominant phase of the past to the Market Responsive phase of the late twentieth century. They reflect the needs of heritage sites to plan positively for tourism and visitation because these activities support conservation in economic and political terms.

In this case, the Visitor Experience Plan underpins the Interpretation Plan. The Visitor Experience Plan has been drawn up in close collaboration with the Interpretation Plan team. The Interpretation Plan is part of a process of:

- Democratising the site – making it intellectually accessible and interesting to the public
- Marketing the site – converting aspects of the site into a viable and valuable product for both recreation and for education
- Explaining the site, what it stands for and why it is special, valuable and fragile
- Creating a strong Visitor Experience

The Visitor Experience concept encompasses the three and perhaps four part process undertaken by each visitor:

- 1) **Pre-visit:** learning about, choosing, planning and travelling to a destination
- 2) **Visit:** being at the destination and being involved with the destination
- 3) **Post visit:** returning home, remembering, discussing and possibly receiving further information from the site
- 4) **Repeat visit:** if the Visit experience was good, and if follow up marketing, direct or indirect, is good, a repeat visit may take place – or another visitor may make a new visit as a consequence of recommendation by the first visitor

A Visitor Experience Plan therefore incorporates aspects of marketing and pre-visit information, signage, travel, welcome, service on site, products consumed (which includes the site itself and related products), physical and emotional activities and responses, and the memories, knowledge and images that remain after the visit. In some cases, a positive visitor experience can lead to personal fulfilment, repeat visits, and word of mouth marketing, plus good business for the site and its community.

Visitor experiences need to be tailored to the markets involved and the lengths of stay taking place or envisaged, together with the qualities and the special needs of the site and its community.

Typically Visitor Experience Planning requires site and market information in order to set up:

- Infrastructure that can improve and add to the visitor experience
- Training to develop quality human interaction with visitors
- The effective Branding of the Experience, to imprint it in the visitor mind and encourage repeat visits
- Quality goods and services
- The clear definition of the main visitor experiences
- A monitoring and improvement programme

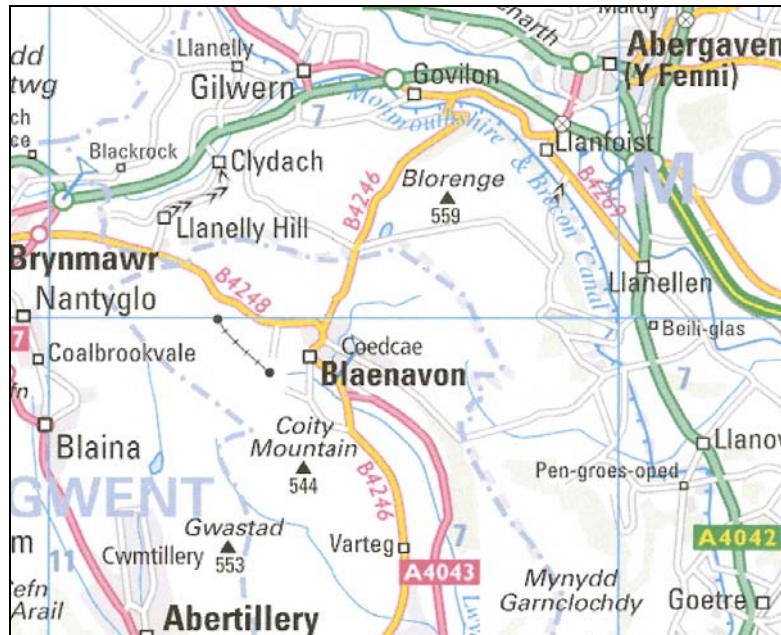
Multi-partner sites, like Blaenavon, need effective partnerships and partnership management systems.

2.2 The Aims of the Blaenavon VEP

The aims of the Visitor Experience Plan are:

1. To help secure the long term viability of World Heritage Site, and the sites within it as a visitor destination, and encourage financial, political, community and conservation support.
2. To help sustain the long term viability of Blaenavon as a settlement and as a vibrant community, in terms of its economy and quality of life.
3. To link the WHS to neighbouring communities in Torfaen, Monmouthshire and the Brecon Beacons so that visitation becomes part of a sub-regional system. Visitors are not aware of, nor guided by, local government boundaries. Noteworthy additions to the WHS boundaries include:
 - in the north, the Clydach Gorge area;
 - in the east, the stretch of Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal that includes Goytre Wharf; and the town of Abergavenny
 - in the west, the whole of Coity Mountain
4. To attract the widest range of visitors to the site, conditional upon the setting of Limits to Acceptable Change by members of the Management Partnership in collaboration with Key Stakeholders, which links in turn to the vulnerability of the site as established in the management plan.
5. To provide a special learning experience for visitors *and* an enjoyable recreational experience, while establish the special significance of the site for visitors.
6. To explain the often abstract concept of World Heritage Site status to visitors, and to note other WHS's around the world.
7. To boost the profile of the Iron Works within the WHS – because it has spare capacity, and it is historically the oldest and most special feature of the Blaenavon story.

8. To establish the WHS and the wider sub-region as an attractive destination with both a vibrant future *and* a vibrant past, rather than being a museum experience, and to make it a fashionable place to visit because of its special qualities as a place of change, a challenging environment and high country experiences.
9. To help, with other stakeholders, to create a seamless high quality series of visitor experiences, from decision to visit to arrival back home.
10. To recognise the strong competition in the visitation market in South Wales and the wider UK.
11. To develop the concept of the area being one for repeat visits, not a one-off destination, a key place to go regularly for a rewarding day out, building the possibility of creating the conditions for supporting overnight stays.
12. To provide a management framework capable of guiding the visitor management of the WHS including ideas for heritage interpretation, marketing, attraction and accommodation development, customer care and certification.
13. To suggest a management mechanism to implement the VEP over the long term, recognising the complex multi-stakeholder nature of the site.
14. To create a long life, loose fit, modular approach able to adapt to ongoing challenges, changes and research.
15. To respond to the challenges of global warming and energy conservation by helping visitors to have a low carbon emission visit wherever possible.
16. To suggest future research and evaluation methods to improve the performance of the WHS and surrounding area as a sustainable destination



Map of the extended Blaenavon Industrial Landscape area to be included in the Visitor Experience Plan.

3 Key Features of the Visitor Experience Plan proposals

This section puts forward a number of ways to make the visitor experience broader, deeper, greener and more market responsive. They aim is to create a destination which can attract repeat visitation, with access to more visitor segments, while retaining, and helping conserve and enhance the character of the area. The current Heritage experience will be deepened and made more attractive. It will be supplemented and complemented by an Outdoor experience, an Events experience and an “Other side of the Mountain” experience. Together they could form a much more broadly based “must-see” destination, providing a more viable economic base for the community and greater support for the World Heritage status of the site. They remain closely linked to the natural and heritage strengths of the site. Suggestions are made for improving quality standards, and improving marketing. The final section of this Visitor Experience Plan – an Action Plan – will examine the issues of creating a management structure to implement the Visitor Experience Plan, and finding funding for the proposals. The section is informed by a range of market surveys, extensive stakeholder consultations, the principles of sustainable tourism and the experiences of heritage destinations and World Heritage Sites in Britain and worldwide.

3.1 Proposals

3.1.1 Build on the status of the site as a World Heritage Site

This document has already commented on the lack of understanding of the term World Heritage Site amongst the public. Some stakeholders have questioned how much emphasis should be placed on the use of the title. This plan champions its use for the following reasons:

- South Wales has a lot of industrial heritage, and many industrial heritage attractions. The World Heritage Site designation differentiates Blaenavon from its competitors. It is a Unique Selling Point, raising its status above the competition. It is an independently verified mark of global importance.
- The World Heritage Site status is politically important. Wales has only one other World Heritage Site. The Cultural Tourism Strategy for Wales, (2003), underlines the role of Blaenavon and Industrial Heritage within this growing theme. In a crowded market place for development funding, World Heritage Site status, and the use of that status is important at International, National as well as Regional levels.
- The status binds together the many partners involved in the site.
- Most other World Heritage Sites manage to put across the importance of WH status to their visitors.



Entrance to the WHS RKE

- Much more could be made of WH status in the marketing of the site, not least by linking it to other more well known iconic sites such as Ayer's Rock / Uluru, Machu Picchu in Peru, or Stonehenge.

3.1.2 Capitalise on the image and success of the Big Pit

Early discussions about visitation to the WHS saw the dominance of the Big Pit's visitor numbers as a problem. Big Pit is widely known, keenly managed, has free admission, is very exciting, and is outside the town of Blaenavon, but these features create very special strengths for the WHS:

- It brings many visitors to the site, who could become repeat visitors to the WHS: it is a major marketing channel, and has great potential as such
- Visitors have panoramic views of part of the WHS site from Big Pit
- It is located next to the restored the Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway, part of the former London & North Western Railway
- It has an active year round management programme linked to the other National Museum of Wales sites
- It is an all weather attraction

The special links and opportunities afforded by the Big Pit should be seen as a major asset and not a problem. Wherever possible the Partnership should work with Big Pit management to develop new visitor experiences for the site, and to encourage Big Pit visitors to return to see and hear the rest of the story. Big Pit has already begun work on this issue. Both anecdotal evidence and visitor research shows that most Big Pit visitors go home after their visit: it is unlikely that they could take in another local attraction on the same visit. A number of simple and low cost devices can be used to pass on the message that there is much more to see: these are discussed later in this report under marketing.



View over Big Pit RKE

3.1.3 Develop the Iron Works site to create an effective second front for heritage visitors

The low level of visitation to the Iron Works does not sit easily with its high level of historic importance, as the oldest site within the WHS and the site which was the major creator of the town and surrounding landscapes of Blaenavon. The Iron Works has benefited recently from better signage and better shop and information facilities. It should benefit from its inclusion within the proposed new interpretation plan and from new interactive guided interpretation systems, the E-Trail, to be introduced from the World Heritage Centre. Attention should be given, however, to increasing the attractiveness of the site by improving the visitor experience:

- By allowing more visitation to the Balancing Tower, and boosting its interpretation.
- By improving the use of the workers cottages by re-enactments, sound etc.
- By setting up some form of iron working within the site. While this may be a new activity for a conservation site, if the activity did not damage the historic fabric and was removable, it could get over to the visitor the excitement and skills of iron working. A starting point could be the development of the type of forge work to be seen at the Black Country Museum. In a number of Dutch and German sites, early iron making techniques are being re-enacted. The heritage industrial sites of the Ruhr Valley in Germany, including the Westfälisches Industriemuseum and linked sites, are especially notable here :

“Westphalian Industry Museums are lively places with parties, concerts, lectures, action days, guided tours and a variety of special events. The range of educational programmes for children and school classes is especially wide. Girls and boys can really get to grips with history, handle coal or iron ore, or mould a brick. ..Die Ratte, (a friendly rat).explains the secrets of the blast furnace at the Heinrichshütte iron and steel works.”

www.lwl.org – the web site of the Westphalian Industrial Museum.

One of the branches of the museum, the Solingen Scissor Museum, has a reconstructed historic furnace where Wootz (also known as Damascus) steel is made on the traditional pattern, with demonstrations of how this material can be fashioned into knives and scissors.

The new Torfaen CBC Public Art Strategy backs the concept of new iron working at Blaenavon. It sees the possibility of developing new craft or artisan iron making in the town at one of two sites...”it would be an opportunity to see the end product of the metal working process rather than just the industrial history of it”.

Consultation with Cadw at high level would be necessary to develop these concepts.



The worker's cottages at Blaenavon Ironworks RKE

3.1.4 The Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway

The Railway was not operational during the period when this plan was developed. It presents a tantalising problem for the plan writer. In a perfect world, it could provide a series of vital heritage experiences – the smell of coal and the feel of smoke – the mechanical nature of the nineteenth century – the slow calm of historic travel – and the dirt. It could also add an important linkage mechanism within the site. But the railway needs very considerable capital expenditure, and has high running costs. It could be an excellent visitor experience. It could be a very long term aspiration. However, much will depend on the success of the Visitor Experience Plan in creating greater visitor flows to make its operation viable. Equally, much will depend on the forthcoming funding bid to the Heads of the Valleys Scheme to allow the railway to obtain the capital support to be redeveloped and the line extended. The Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway is also applying to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a Project Planning grant. If successful, the railway could become a vital part of the proposed four-part Visitor Experience envisioned in this plan. Like the proposed activities at the Iron Works, the Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway has the potential to strengthen the market appeal of the Heritage Visitor Experience. It could also add to the Events experience, providing a range of restored railway events at peak seasons.

3.1.5 The New Interpretation Plan

The adoption of the proposed new interpretation plan will add further market appeal to the Heritage Experience. The role of the new plan is two fold:

- To add interest and understanding to the site
- To help unify the presentation of the site, bringing the various strands of the Heritage Experience (and the other related experiences discussed here) together.

3.1.6 The World Heritage Site Centre

The opening of the World Heritage Site centre will continue the process of strengthening, unifying and deepening the Heritage Experience. Further, the proposals for interpretation in this Plan mesh well with the proposals for interpretation at the World Heritage Site Centre.



Renovation of the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre RKE

3.1.7 Capitalise on the image and success of the Brecon Beacons National Park: Creating an Outdoor Visitor Experience

45% of the land of the WHS lies within the Brecon Beacons National Park. The greatest single feature that visitors to South East Wales seek is known to be landscape and scenery. The greatest single activity undertaken by the British visitor to the countryside is walking. A series of signed and interpreted walking routes has already been developed within the WHS. It follows that it should be possible to further develop a “Land” or “Outdoors” experience within the WHS to act as a balance to the “People and Industry” experience upon which heritage tourism has been built. Recent figures supplied by Torfaen Borough Council show that the use of the moorland for walking is increasing rapidly.

This conscious act has a number of advantages. It helps build the idea of Blaenavon as a place of action and enjoyment, not only a place of history. It appeals to a younger and more active age group. It helps the emphasis move to the rural parts of the site. And it helps build a progressive image for the area. This is especially so because of the paragliding and other outdoor sports already practiced from Blorengce.

There are four technical links to this theme which must be mentioned:

- The themes of Land, People, and Trade and Industry are linked in the Interpretation Plan by the concept of land and people in the WHS being part of an evolving continuum, an on-going man / land relationship. Outdoor recreation is the new gold, nourishing the work face as coal and iron did in the past.
- There is a proposal within Torfaen CBC’s Countryside Section to create an Informal Outdoor Recreation Centre with the World Heritage Site Centre in Blaenavon. The centre would co-ordinate information and other activities.
- There are plans for a Heads of the Valley Regional Park. This part of the Visitor Experience Plan would help unite Blaenavon with that Regional Park concept.
- Torfaen CBC and Monmouthshire County Council has already developed a range of themed walks including the Iron Mountain Trail.
- The Ranger Service has a number of ideas for the development of an “Active Heritage Programme” in the area, in part in conjunction with outdoor centres who have already expressed strong interest.



3.1.8 Incorporate the Tourism Assets of the western side of the Vale of Usk into the Visitor Experience: Creating a linked Alternative Visitor Experience

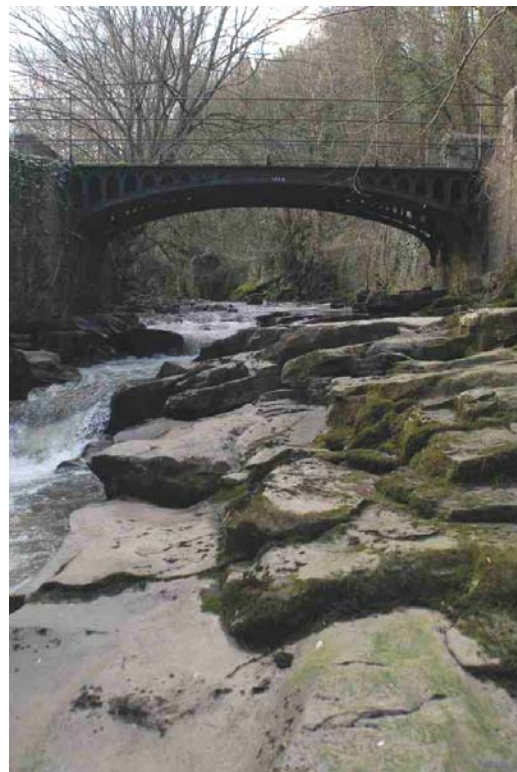
Some parts of Monmouthshire's Vale of Usk lie within the World Heritage's site boundary. 40% Much more of its territory has been closely linked to the industrial rise of Blaenavon over the centuries. Monmouthshire is a member of the Blaenavon Partnership. Monmouthshire County, like Torfaen County Borough, has an active tourism development department.

The Vale of Usk has a key role in the Visitor Experience Plan for several reasons:

- The Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal played an important part in the operation of the Blaenavon industrial complex.
- There are several important historic industrial features on the west side of the Vale including the remains of the Clydach Ironworks, associated workers' housing, the Canal and its wharves, Lime Kilns and disused railways and linked structures.
- The landscape of the west side of the Vale is recognised as an important example of a pre-enclosure landscape with characteristic field patterns, ecology and settlements.
- There is a growing tourism infrastructure available, including the canal side Goytre Wharf, Sustrans Route 46, cycle hire facilities, an extensive footpath network, accommodation and refreshment facilities.
- The wider Abergavenny area provides an important range of accommodation, with 750 serviced beds, 544 self catering beds, and 1368 bed spaces in caravan and camping sites. There is surplus capacity here: in 2006 average bed occupancy was only 43% for serviced accommodation, and 55% for self catering.
- The Abergavenny Tourist Information Centre received over 42,000 visitors in 2006.
- Tourism in the area is growing at approximately 6% per year.

The western Vale of Usk could join Heritage and the Outdoors as a third visitor experience linked to the World Heritage Site – to be marketed as “The Other Side of the Mountain”. It would act as an alternative site for those not immediately interested in Industrial Heritage, and for older walkers / cyclists seeking less arduous routes. It could also be seen as one of three key Gateways to the World Heritage Site, a window to the East and to the English Midlands.

It should be noted however that the very features of the landscape and built environment of “the other side of the mountain” that make it attractive also impose the special need to conserve those features. Essentially it is an area ill suited in many places to additional car traffic. Its road links to the town of Blaenavon could be problematic. The road from Blaenavon to Clydach via Pwll-du could be dangerous for visitor traffic because it is narrow, steep and is flanked by a deep valley. This road should not be through signed beyond Pwll-du, and other



The Clydach Gorge RKE

restrictions could be considered. Traffic should be guided on to the B4246. Equally, access to many of the narrow lanes around Clydach and south west of Govilon should be restricted. This conservation issue is not a weakness: it is a potential strength allowing the area to be developed as a quiet walking / cycling destination, a green special corner of the World Heritage Site. It could become a management model for many other similar parts of rural Wales.

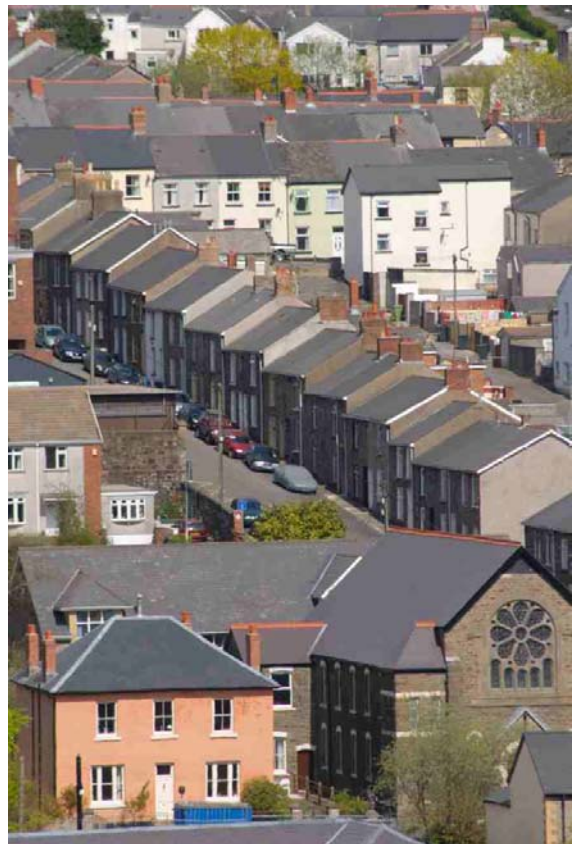
3.1.9 Developing the Blaenavon Town experience: Creating an Events Visitation culture

While over 150,000 people pass through the doors at the Big Pit each year, a series of questionnaire surveys show that very few indeed go on to visit Blaenavon. While the author of this report was interviewing visitors at the Big Pit, a common question asked was – what is there to see and do there? In winter that was a difficult question to answer. Yet the integration of Blaenavon into the overall visitor experience, while difficult, could pay real benefits. The location of the new St Peters Visitor Centre will offer ample opportunities to do this. Another important key to opening up the town could be to create attractive visitor experiences from dormant assets, which can be opened up as a series of special events. Events are especially important in encouraging repeat day visits; they also provide a boost to local economies.

The Workmen’s Hall is the most important underused asset. This splendid historic building is well used by local people in the evenings but less so during the day. Its role could be to stage events – films, plays and performances on perhaps a monthly basis in summer would be a start. A model could be the small remote Tasmanian town of Strahan. Here the Round Earth Theatre Company enacts on a daily basis the history of the town in a dramatic audience participation play, *The Ship that Never Was*, a story of poor people’s struggle in nineteenth century Tasmania. The 2-man low cost play has now been performed 5000 times and has created an offshoot round the area dramatic interpretation tour. *The Ship that Never Was* attracts large and regular mid-afternoon audiences. It has broken the image of Strahan as a dull unattractive town, and created a new image and a new audience. (see www.roundearth.com.au and www.strahanvillage.com.au). Blaenavon has an especially important link to possible arts based work - the Blaenavon Community Heritage and Cordell Museum, and the rich heritage of Cordell stories.

Other key buildings could be St Peter’s Church and some of the many fine Chapels in the town, opening on a monthly “Open Doors Day” basis.

Together these assets could be linked to a range of existing events, including the Blues Festival, the Literary Festival, World Heritage Day, the Garn Lakes Country Fayre, the Annual Big Pit lecture, Interpretive Walks and other events linked to the range of visitor experiences across the site.



View over Blaenavon town centre RKE

In addition to the above, the proposals in the new Torfaen CBC Public Art Strategy for a range of public sculptures in the town and for revised signing will also assist the regeneration of Blaenavon.

3.1.10 Low carbon visitation and integrating the site

The need to reduce tourism's impact on the environment is now well recognised. The WHS can benefit from this trend, gaining publicity, and gaining visitors.

- There is an Express Bus, the X24, from Newport to Blaenavon every 10 minutes throughout the day. Should bus travellers perhaps receive a discount on Iron Works entry? Could the bus display WHS logos? Could it be named the World Heritage Route?
- The Brecon Beacons National Park operate Beacons Bus Network: there is a possibility to combine forces with this green visitor network. Possible routes would include Abergavenny to Blaenavon and extensions and variations of existing Beacons Bus routes. Initial discussions with the Brecon Beacons National Park have been positive.
- Newport Transport has a historic bus, a double deck Leyland PD2 from the 1950s, for hire which could provide:
 - A special Newport – Blaenavon link
 - A Shuttle around the WHS service
 - An Abergavenny – Blaenavon Link

Hire rates are competitive; it is envisaged that the hire would only take place on peak visitation weekends

- Monmouthshire County Council have a volunteer driven 16 seat "Demand Responsive" 15 seat bus which is available for hire at weekends. This bus could provide a service on the "Other side of the mountain" where narrow roads are the norm.
- The Abergavenny Food Festival (15-16 September 2007) could be an ideal time to offer heritage bus services to Blaenavon, perhaps linked to a Workmen's Hall Workers Food Celebration

Integration of the site by bus shuttle has long been discussed. While an early experiment was not successful, a further attempt could be made drawing on the wide experience of the Brecon Beacons National Park and other protected areas in this field.

Within this section it is very important to mention the value of free bus travel now available to all residents of Wales who are over 60 years old, and that this concession may be extended to all UK citizens in 2008. The over 60s visitor market is large and growing.

3.1.11 The Friends of Blaenavon concept

Closely related to developing the Blaenavon Visitor Experience would be the idea of a well motivated group of volunteers, based on the growing number of Voluntary Rangers. Volunteers could provide guided tours, and develop the People part of the Interpretation Plan. Volunteer management and incentivisation training would be needed with funding required for training, materials and equipment

3.1.12 Marketing the visitor experience

The Visitor Experience Plan has key links into marketing the WHS. Given that the WHS is essentially an intellectual concept, marketing has a large part to play in putting the benefits of the concept across, of making the most of the unique selling points outlined in this plan.

Five key issues need to be tackled:

- The way forward at this stage is not the ability to get people to stay overnight in the region. That concept is premature and probably too difficult to implement for some years, (see below). It is the need to create and market a second and third repeat day visit to the WHS. That concept would fit with the known preponderance of day visits in this region. To do that the WHS needs an exciting and modern image and a range of reasons to come back. The new visitor experiences discussed above provide those reasons, adding outdoor recreation to heritage, adding excitement to history and fashionable arts to the heritage and outdoor experiences.
- Branding and the question of understanding the WHS is closely allied to marketing. This is the issue of improving the image of the WHS as an exciting place to visit, with many high quality things to choose from. The Big Pit made that breakthrough. To support the brand, other actors now need to make that breakthrough. The Interpretation Plan gives a first way forward. This Visitor Experience Plan, with its quality assurance proposals (see below) can provide the essential requirement of all brands – a quality, market aware product.
- Signs and information provision all fit under the Marketing umbrella. More WHS Brand signs are needed on key roads before arrival at Blaenavon. They should not replace Big Pit signs but supplement and support Big Pit signs. Within and beyond the WHS a Signs review should consider their size, visibility, consistency and aims: this review is now taking place.
 - External marketing should concentrate on the Key Benefits and Visitor Experiences to be had from a visit to the area, and on the good value, quality and tangible effects of regeneration. Print and web-based material should be selling documents, rather than the descriptive documents that are currently available. They need to concentrate on the four great visitor experiences that the World Heritage Site can offer: The Heritage Experience



A guided walk along the cycle track *Torfaen CBC*

- The Outdoor Experience
- The Events Experience
- The Other side of the Mountain: the Secret Complementary Experience
- These messages need to be repeated on the site's print materials, the web site and on each stakeholder's materials. It is essential, too, that the Interpretation Plan echoes these four experiences at least indirectly and that the related marketing effort reflects the interpretive approach and vice versa. While the interpretation must deal with the integrity and realities of the story, the way the product is marketed can be creative in its echoing of the experiences and stories.
- A review of marketing channels should be undertaken, with special attention paid to further developing links with the TICs in partnership members' areas.

Internal marketing is low cost, and because of the high propensity of this market to repeat visits, should be very effective. Everyone leaving Big Pit should be given a Repeat Visit invitation. The same should apply to every other site within the WHS, and at restaurants, suitable shops and other outlets. That Repeat Visit information should stress the great experiences to be had, not just list possibilities. Internal marketing will also be assisted by the training for local businesses discussed under the Quality heading below. Owners and staff at bars, restaurants, shops, and B&B's need advice and training to provide consistent, high quality and up to date information about the WHS.

Finally it is important to stress that if the Visitor Experience is to be a good one, capable of attracting repeat visits, the marketing task is more than just selling and more than just information giving. It must play its part in developing the 'feel good' factor about a visit to Blaenavon. To do that, it must – together with the product development programme - understand and use aspirational and life style marketing approaches to its content and approach.

3.1.13 The Accommodation Question

There is very little overnight accommodation in Blaenavon. Normally a Visitor Experience Plan would seek to create accommodation facilities – to strengthen the visitor experience and to increase retained visitor spend within the site. This, however, would not be easy within Blaenavon. There is no tradition of offering accommodation and property types and sizes are often not suitable for this type of conversion. There is little hospitality infrastructure to supply a range of meals etc. Given current visitation patterns to the site, there is also insufficient demand to encourage accommodation provision.

The Abergavenny area has however a considerable range of accommodation, and with relatively low occupancy levels there is spare capacity. It is suggested that WHS marketing materials should promote this possibility to visitors. In the long term there are a number of ways in which accommodation in Blaenavon could be created, but the immediate need is to develop visitation to the town in order to support that long term aspiration.

3.1.14 Seasonality

Although Big Pit is an all weather, year round attraction, the WHS is still seasonal in its market appeal. The Iron Works in particular is unlikely to support winter opening for some years to come. Given the seasonal realities of the site, this weakness can be turned into a strength by developing the Visitor Experience Plan to capitalise on Seasonality by offering:

The Winter Season Experience – stressing a number of indoor events, winter walking, and the all weather attractions of Big Pit. Product development – see the action plan – should be able to devise Traditional Winters in the Valleys events to support this approach.

A High Season Experience – when the warmth and light of Spring comes, more things are open, visitor numbers are higher and outdoor events can be planned.

3.1.15 Quality

Central to the whole concept of Visitor Experience Plans is the requirement to provide a quality experience in line or ahead of market expectations. Closely coupled with that concept is the need to provide advice and training to reach the required quality levels, and ways of measuring and certifying quality. Together, these requirements begin to fulfil the requirements of brand creation.

Quality issues to be tackled at Blaenavon can be listed as follows:

Pre-visit: learning about, choosing, planning and travelling to a destination. This aspect requires new web site and print material, aimed at giving the benefits and unique value of a visit to this site, its world champion status, and easy and effective ways of getting more information. The 2-Season. 4-Experience nature of the site should be stressed. The innovative efforts to develop the quality of the site (see below) should be stressed

Visit: being at the destination and being involved with the destination. This requires clear and effective signposting to the site and within the site. Management advice and training, plus staff training should ensure a warm and sincere welcome for visitors to all sites, and to all shops, pubs, cafes, restaurants and accommodation providers (Parks Canada, 2005). Quality audits followed by advice and training should be offered to all enterprises involved with visitors. An annual quality session should be offered to bring visitor enterprises within the site together, to hear their experiences, to review progress and to learn about new visitor management techniques.

Special sessions should be offered to food and beverage providers to increase their knowledge of market requirements, ways of fulfilling those requirements, and new ideas being used in other destinations. Some establishments within the area are in great need of help here.

Information should be available at all sites to encourage repeat visits to other parts of the WHS. That material should in outline follow the 4-Experience format. In detail it should make available the opening times and days not just of attractions but of shops and hospitality providers; the latter should maintain those hours.

If possible, e-mail contact addresses should be gathered to enable follow up e-mails to be sent about future visit possibilities.

The Big Pit should have a central role in the development of these measures. It has greatest numbers of visitors to the site and the greatest experience of managing visitors. It has, as part of the National Museum of Wales, the greatest professional backing for visitor management work. It also has three key areas within its site for meeting and greeting, questionnaire work and whole site promotion: the holding area prior to descending the mine shaft, the canteen and the shop.

Post visit: returning home, remembering, discussing and possibly receiving further information from the site. Quality evaluations should be carried out while visitors are on site to gain their overall impressions of the site. Some evaluations could be carried out post visit

by telephone or e-mail. Post visit contacts by e-mail newsletter, announcement of special events etc will be essential.

Repeat visit: if the Visit experience was good, and if follow up marketing, direct or indirect, is good, a repeat visit may take place – or another visitor may make a new visit as a consequence of recommendation by the first visitor. The concept of the repeat visit should be consciously incorporated into all marketing materials, and all quality training. Repeat visits should be encouraged by devices such as competitions and awards to repeat visitors.

3.1.16 Certifying Quality

To measure quality, and to prove quality, and to provide a marketable claim to quality, a recognised certification system should be used. The following opportunities should be considered:

Welcome Host Wales provides a long established customer service training programme, with the backing of Visit Wales, and linked to an internationally recognised logo and award system. It is currently geared to individual businesses rather than destinations. It is, however, now undergoing major re-organisation and it may be able to offer a destination training / certification programme at some time in the future. (www.welcome-host-wales.co.uk)

The Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Service , VAQUAS Cymru, offers tools for attraction operators that can be used to assess and then enhance quality service from enquiry to departure. It too is backed by Visit Wales. It does not grade attractions, but does use objective quality benchmarks provided by the industry. Like Welcome Host it is designed for individual businesses rather than destinations, but could be adapted to cater for destinations.

The Integrated Quality Management approach (IQM) is a European-led initiative which encourages destinations to develop a sustainable and consumer led approach to tourism. It has been used by a number of local authorities in Wales led by Ceredigion and supported by the University of Aberystwyth working with Visit Wales. However it – like the other schemes outlined above – does not totally fit the requirements of Blaenavon. It has previously been used at a whole local authority level, is relatively long term in its development and benefits and is not designed specifically for heritage sites.

Green Dragon and **Green Globe** are both environmental quality management and assurance schemes: Green Dragon is Wales based; Green Globe is international. However, while either could be valuable, they are not based on service quality, and they would not tackle the need for rapid service quality improvements.

None of the above schemes, however, provides a perfect solution for Blaenavon WHS's requirements. The Action Plan below suggests a possible way forward.



Interpretation Centre – Blaenavon Ironworks RKE

4 An Action Plan: Implementing the Visitor Experience Plan

It is relatively easy to write a Visitor Experience Plan. It is relatively difficult to implement such a plan. This section explores the structures available, the costs involved and funding opportunities.

4.1 The Current Concept

Currently, any visitor related issues affecting the whole World Heritage Site are raised at a full Partnership Meeting. If consensus for an initiative is found, funding is sought from amongst the Partners, and then detailed implementation issues are discussed by the Marketing Group drawn from most members of the Partnership. Most issues are dealt with on an annual basis. The current marketing budget for the whole site is between £15,000 and £20,000 per annum drawn from Partnership. There is no "Visitor/ Visitation" sub-group as such, dedicated to examining the issues of visitation growth and management on a broader basis. Members of the Marketing sub group come from each of the two local authorities, Monmouthshire and Torfaen, from Brecon Beacons National Park, from Cadw, Big Pit and British Waterways. Torfaen is the lead implementation authority. Implementation is usually distributed across the partnership members, using funds and staff time on an "as available" basis.

The current concept has moved the World Heritage Site on from its beginnings to the present day situation when a Visitor Experience Plan has been called for to take a wider look at visitation to the WHS. An analysis of the current concept shows that the annual basis of the planning system is a little short term. Planning and change is dependent on slowly shrinking local government budgets and especially on very tightly stretched professional staff resources. All the professional staff involved must give first priority to the requirements of their primary employer, not to the partnership. The Marketing sub group is a large body with no single person with hands-on responsibility for change, development and targets. On a broader background scale, there is a trend across the UK to move from local authority control of tourism development, planning and marketing towards arms length Destination Management Organizations, with specific targets and funds. There is also one further background issue that needs to be mentioned. While Tourism Partnerships have their strengths, there are also a range of weaknesses, especially with multi-member partnerships, common to all partnerships across the tourism industry. They include high staff time needs and costs, quality control issues, consensus problems and slow reaction times (Bramwell & Lane, 2004).

4.2 Developing the Current Concept

This section examines how the current concept might be revised to implement the Visitor Experience and Interpretation Plans.

Three changes appear to be essential to making progress:

1. The appointment of at least one, and preferably two, new professional staff to drive forward the implementation of the Visitor Experience Plan and the Interpretation Plan. They would be responsible for addressing issues as they arise and negotiating a way forward. They would analyse and decide the priorities within both Plans, examine costs in detail, and seek funding external to the local authorities. They would then,

working with relevant stakeholders and organizations, work to implement the plans. The new staff should be able to bring their undivided attention to the task. They would bring new skills and new networks into play.

2. The creation of a development fund to support the programme of work to be undertaken by the new staff. In addition to the costs of c. £80,000 per annum to remunerate and support the new staff, at least £25,000 would be needed to redesign the Blaenavon WHS web site, and associated print materials. In addition a budget of at least £50,000 per annum would be required for quality training, and product development. This development fund should be sought from outside the local authorities – see the New Concept proposals below.
3. A new steering group to give broad (not detailed) oversight to the work of the new staff. That steering group should be much smaller than the current Marketing sub group, and work at strategic, not tactical, level.

The aim of these three proposals is to give impetus to the work of the World Heritage Site for the sake of the broader Wales economy, for the local economy and for the conservation and enhancement of the site. Adoption of this way forward would require intra-partnership support. It would also require considerable support from outside the partnership. Because this way forward would be centred on one locality only, and because there is great competition for financial resources across Wales, the related, but more radical concept below should also be considered.

4.3 A New Concept: An Alternative Action Plan

Across the UK, and in many of the protected areas and World Heritage Sites of the world, many new management concepts are now being implemented to cope with the problems and possibilities of the visitor market. They seek to contain costs, develop revenues and they seek to react to the growing competition within the tourism industry. They draw on the rapidly increasing experience of various forms of destination management now available. (See, for example, Eagles, 2002 & 2004; Buckley, 2003, Parks Canada 1995)

The original concept of direct public sector input into, and control of, the overall visitor experience is being superseded by many more arms-length product development and marketing arrangements which give greater flexibility, more market responsiveness, access to entrepreneurial flair and yet greater ultimate (but not day to day) regulatory power to democratic bodies. Public-private sector partnerships are one example of the new trends. Destination Management Organizations are another example. Franchise concepts are being used experimentally in a number of places. Project based targeted initiatives are also being tried, as a way of testing new concepts prior to their being used more generally.

These background trends are central to the thinking behind the alternative Action Plan proposed in this section. The Alternative Plan also draws on the experience of seeking funds from public bodies in the UK in recent years, and the creation of a new approach to one of the UK's other World Heritage Sites, Hadrian's Wall.

(1) The Need to Explore New Concepts for Wider Use

Given pressure on national resources, it is very possible that Blaenavon WHS would not succeed in obtaining funds to implement the Visitor Experience and Interpretation Plans just for its own local purposes. It should therefore seek funds to test the many new concepts proposed here which would also be applicable to other parts of the Welsh or the wider UK Heritage Estate. The idea of developing and testing a model dedicated cycling / walking

approach to the “Other Side of the Mountain” has already been mentioned in this report. Other possibilities include:

- The idea of creating an integral across site quality development programme, with a heritage destination quality mark is important: none of the existing quality schemes do this, except the environmental schemes. This concept could have worldwide importance, covering all aspects of the visitor experience.
- The idea of developing better overall low carbon footprint links to a heritage area, including local and heritage transport, cycling and walking, and Demand Responsive services.
- Ways of using new types of development within Scheduled Historic Monuments and similar sites, perhaps on the German model, suggested for the Iron Works, using the pre-cautionary principle and the principle of reversible change. This could be of great overall value to many other CADW and other UK sites.
- The concept of using Integrated Interpretation as a Product Development and Marketing technique, creating market responsive interpretation, interpretation that can link across sites, and use a range of media from performance to electronic media via a hierarchy of story lines, story posts and story ghosts.
- New approaches to marketing heritage sites, including appreciation and use of life style and aspirational marketing, and the integration of local foods and heritage foods into the marketing and product development product.

The existence of national and international benefit potential allows national funding agencies to gain greater and more justifiable input from any inputs they might make.

(2) The Need to Develop a New Delivery Mechanism

Visitor Experience delivery systems are not well suited to pure public sector operation: for that reason public-private sector partnership arrangements have long been found to have some practical and political advantages. Such an arrangement existed for some years for the Hadrian’s Wall World Heritage Site. But, just as at Blaenavon, the complexities of the site, the number of stakeholders involved and lack of financial backing made progress slow. In 2006 a new delivery mechanism was defined and put into operation. This is Hadrian’s Wall Heritage Ltd (HWHL), a company limited by guarantee, that aims to make the most of the Wall for its community and region, while ensuring the conservation of the asset that is Hadrian’s Wall. (See www.hadrians-wall.org)

The more detailed mission and vision of the company is:

Our Mission:

To realise the economic, social and cultural regeneration potential of the Hadrian’s Wall World Heritage Site and the communities and environment through which it passes, by sustainable tourism development, management and conservation activities which benefit local communities and the wider region and in a way that reflects the values embodied in the World Heritage Site Management Plan.

Our Vision:

Hadrian’s Wall will be world-renowned for best practice in World Heritage Site management, for the quality of the visitor experience and for its contribution to the local and regional economy through sustainable tourism.

In effect, the key partners associated with Hadrian's Wall have handed operational control of the Wall to a type of private sector company, one able to interface with visitors, the private, public and non profit sectors in a way that a partnership of public sector organizations could not. Rapid progress has followed, with a new Management Plan, Marketing and Interpretation plans in development and a host of other initiatives. A ten year programme of capital and revenue projects is delivering economic and conservation benefits. New links have been made with the private sector, and visitation is growing rapidly. Links with the Wall's communities and with community groups have also flourished.

The public sector has not lost control of the Wall: it can end the arrangements it has made with HWHL if problems arise. But it has focused the Public-Private Partnership in a new and so far unique way. Key features include:

- a staff of seventeen professionals;
- core funding from English Heritage, the Countryside Agency/Natural England, One North East and the North West Development Agency; and
- a Board of 4 public sector representatives and 4 private sector representatives (including people with media, tourism, accounting and management experience).

This pioneering concept has an application to the Blaenavon World Heritage Site. While Blaenavon is a smaller site than Hadrian's Wall, it has similar product complexity, multi-stakeholder mix and a need to create social and economic regeneration. It, like Hadrian's Wall could also benefit from the injection of new initiatives. Further, it could be a model to be tested for application to other heritage sites in Wales, and to be used as a test bed for other agencies in Wales. A similar core funding model could be used, including:

- Visit Wales
- Cadw
- The Countryside Council for Wales
- The Welsh Assembly's Department for Enterprise, Innovation, and Networks

Additional funding could come from the Heads of the Valleys Programme, from the Heritage Lottery Fund and from expertise and interest in the National Museum Wales.

The total funding requirement for this alternative concept is negotiable, depending on the number of projects to be pursued and at what speed. A minimum of £150,000 per year for a minimum of five years should be considered.

Bernard Lane
Red Kite Environment
May 2007

Section 2 Interpretation Plan

5 Interpretive resources and opportunities for interpretation

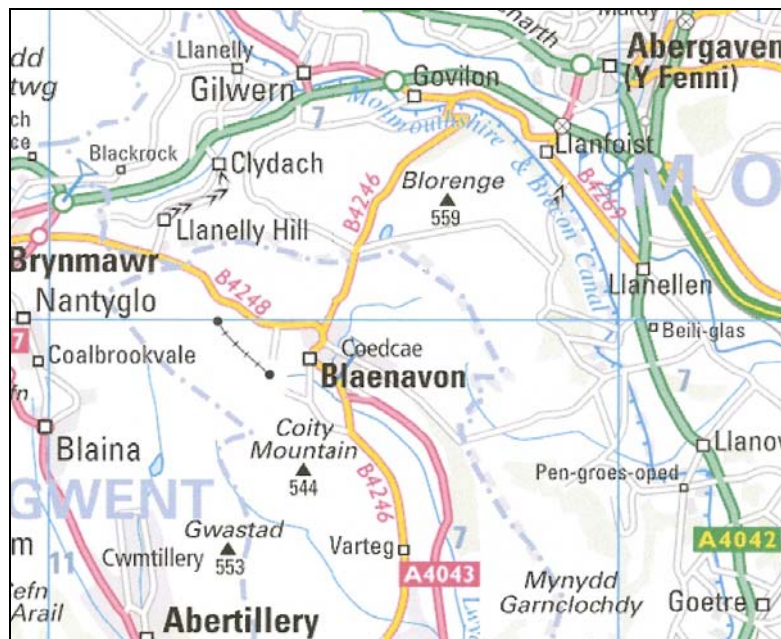
5.1 Introduction

This Interpretation Plan establishes and lays down the principles, policies and aims for interpretation in the Blaenavon World Heritage Site. It appraises its current and imminent interpretive resources, develops themes and storylines and makes recommendations on the media that will be most appropriate for the site. A detailed five-year Action Plan for interpretation appears in Section 3.

5.2 Boundaries

As we stated in the Visitor Experience Plan – in the context of which this Interpretation Plan should be read – we have taken as the basis for our geographical boundaries the formal boundary of the World Heritage Site but extended it, in terms of the visitor experience and our interpretation proposals, to incorporate:

- To the north, the Clydach Gorge, Gilwern and Govilon area
- To the east, the stretch of Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal that includes Goytre Wharf and Abergavenny
- To the west, the rest of Coity Mountain.



Map of the extended Blaenavon Industrial Landscape area for purposes of interpretation.

This is the area broadly shown on the map above and encourages visitors to explore beyond the designated Blaenavon Industrial Landscape boundary to places with considerable natural and cultural interest and resonance which have thematic links to Blaenavon Industrial Landscape itself. We considered extending the boundary to the south to include the former Blaenserchan Colliery near Abersychan and Pontypool Museum but have not included them although we suggest they be referred to, where appropriate, in interpretive media relating to the wider Blaenavon Industrial Landscape story.

Nor have we included Abergavenny in our extended boundary but the town, as a gateway from the north, is of considerable importance as an information point about the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape and as a starting point for those who may have the Brecon Beacons National Park as their main focus but who may also be encouraged to visit the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape as such, part of which lies, of course, within the southern part of the Park.

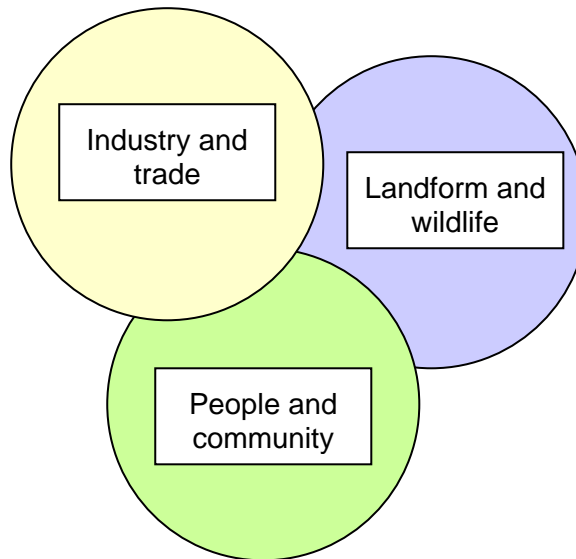
The area broadly to the north of the formal boundary of the World Heritage Site, largely within the National Park, corresponds to the 'other side of the mountain' which forms the Secret Complementary Experience set out in the Visitor Experience Plan. Its interpretation is, of course, integrated in many ways with the overall interpretive approach but individual sites, and the area of, for example, Clydach Gorge, will justify interpretation in its own right.

We have taken as the basis for our *historical* boundaries the principal period of Blaenavon's industrial development and achievement but extended it back into the long period from prehistoric times to the later 18th century and into the shorter but presently relevant period of the post-industrial era in order to give it context, and to relate it both to wider events in the past and to visitors' experience and understanding of events close to their own lifetimes. The interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage within these geographical and historical boundaries should incorporate the Heritage Experience, the Outdoor Experience and the Events Experience which all form part of the Visitor Experience Plan.

5.3 Interpretive resources

We have divided into three our overview of what we call interpretive resources – ie those physical, social and intellectual elements of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape and its story which can provide the basis for interpretation. We comment later on existing interpretive facilities. The three divisions we have used are those we refer to again when discussing storylines and characters:

- Industry and trade
- People and community
- Landform and wildlife



Industry and trade – general

- Early exploitation of iron and coal, from prehistoric times to the late 18th century
- Coming of the iron industry in the late 18th century
- Development and operation of the iron industry
- Development of canals and railways serving docks and export trade
- Development of the coal industry for, and in parallel with, the iron industry
- 'Downstream' and other industries.

Industry and trade – specific sites

- Big Pit National Coal Museum, currently the visitor 'epicentre' of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape
- Blaenavon Ironworks, the springboard for industrial development in the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, including the water balance tower and furnaces
- Blaenavon Workmen's Hall and Institute, an important educational and social centre
- Chapels and churches, and their considerable influence on community life; this could be linked to proposals for church tourism initiatives
- Clydach and its role in the industrial story
- Cwmavon former brewery, an important but inaccessible building
- Doncaster's Foundry, a continuing part of the iron-making industry
- Garnddyrys, the principal early centre for producing wrought iron
- Gilwern and its role in the industrial story
- Govilon and its role in the industrial story
- Goytre Wharf and its role in the transportation story

- Hill's Pits and Tramroad, important elements in the overall Blaenavon Industrial Landscape story
- Llanfoist Wharf and Incline, important elements in the overall Blaenavon Industrial Landscape story
- Keeper's Pond, an important element in the overall Blaenavon Industrial Landscape story
- Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal (incorporating the Brecknock & Abergavenny Canal and the Monmouthshire Canal), and its role in the transportation story
- Opencast mining sites and their role at the end of the 'industrial era'
- Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway and its past and present roles, including its proposed extension
- Pwll-du and Tyla quarries, tunnels, tramroads and spoilheaps, important elements in the overall Blaenavon Industrial Landscape story
- Raceworks, important elements in the overall Blaenavon Industrial Landscape story
- Scourings, tips and bell pits, important elements in the overall Blaenavon Industrial Landscape story



Entrance to Pwll Du tunnel RKE

People and community – general

- Alexander Cordell's historical novels as evocations of past community life
- Chartism and the rise of workers' call for rights; this could be linked to wider regional projects interpreting the role of Chartism
- Education, its development and role in the community
- Health and welfare and their role in changing community life
- Industrial Revolution and its impact on the Blaenavon area

- Post-industrial developments, industrial, social and cultural
- Social conditions and divisions in response to industrial development and change
- Trades unions and the establishment of workers' rights
- Truck system and its effect on community life

People and community – specific sites

- Blaenavon Community Heritage and Cordell Museum, a valuable window on to community life and the story of the imported 'local hero'
- Blaenavon town, public buildings and housing, evidence of earlier community life
- Blaenavon Workmen's Hall, a vital part of the story of the industrial community, self-improvement and social life in need of greater interpretation
- Forge Side, an important group of company houses
- St Peter's Church and graveyard, important elements in the community story which are in need of greater interpretation
- St Peter's School / World Heritage Centre, a new focus for interpreting the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape in a historic building



Blaenavon Community Heritage and Cordell Museum RKE

Landform and wildlife – general

- Geology and morphology, the structure and shape of the land
- Ecology of the area, the wildlife and habitats in the area
- Natural resources including iron, coal, sandstone, limestone, clay and water
- Water management including lakes, rivers, canal and ditches

Landform and wildlife – specific sites

- The Bloreng, its natural and industrial heritage
- Brecon Beacons National Park in its own right and as a part of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape

- Clydach Gorge and its influence on industrial development
- Garn Lakes, their past and present roles
- the Fforest Fawr Geopark, highlighting the importance of the geology in the area
- Ogof Draenan , the second-largest cave system in the UK where prehistoric remains continue to be found
- The Punchbowl, the small lake to the east of the area
- Waun Afon, an important area of blanket bog with high biodiversity interest
- Coity Tips, which links natural and post-industrial landscapes
- The Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal for its ecology
- Garnddyrys, a nationally important site for bryophytes & fungi
- Pwll-du Quarry Special Area of Conservation, a Natura 2000 site for its rare rowan trees, bats etc
- Garn Yr Erw, for its fossils



The Clydach Gorge RKE

5.4 Interpretive opportunities

The following facilities and services offer opportunities for interpreting the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, for providing information about the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape and for encouraging people to visit the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape:

- Abergavenny, with its TIC, as a principal locus for visitors with a range of hospitality and other services
- Blaenavon TIC, open during the summer at the Ironworks, is clearly an important source of information and orientation for visitors

- Blaenavon, with a growing range of attractions and facilities, offering a chance to 'intercept' visitors and introduce them to the wider story of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape; this and the following opportunities can all contribute to the Heritage Experience outlined in the Visitor Experience Plan
- Brecon Beacons National Park, the major tourism and recreation draw providing opportunities for widening visitors' interests
- Bus services, offering opportunities to 'brand' them as serving the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape and to make information available before and on journeys; this could include extending the Beacons Bus service linking Abergavenny with the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape
- Car parks and picnic sites, where introductory interpretation can encourage wider visiting



- Church Tourism project which can contribute to, and draw upon, the interpretive approach devised for the WHS as a whole
- Cycle routes whose users can be introduced to the wider story through various media related to their primary interest
- Events and activities which can, in themselves, contribute to interpreting the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape or can act as ways of 'intercepting' visitors and introducing them to the wider story; they will play a major role in the Event Experience outlined in the Visitor Experience Plan
- Extreme and other outdoor sports whose users can be introduced to the wider story through various media related to their primary interest
- Forgotten Landscapes project which, like the Church Tourism Project, can contribute to, and draw upon, the interpretive approach devised for the WHS as a whole

- Heads of the Valleys Regional Park, a potential focus for visitors providing opportunities for widening their interests
- National Cycle Route whose users can be introduced to the wider story through various media related to their primary interest
- Outdoor recreational facilities, activities and events provide an opportunity for interpretation to play a part in broadening their scope and widening the enjoyment of participants – the Outdoor Experience of the Visitor Experience Plan
- Themed trails whose users can be introduced to the wider story through various media related to their primary interest
- Viewing points and views which can be interpretive points in themselves and / or encourage visitors to explore from them

Torfaen County Borough has recently published a draft Public Art Strategy. Art of various kinds, but particularly installations and sculptures both large and small, offers an opportunity for interpretation on a permanent or temporary basis. The

development of craft ironworking at Blaenavon Ironworks, for example, would contribute to an understanding of the material, its sources and uses.



Cycle trail near Govilon RKE

6 Appraisal of existing interpretive media

In developing this interpretive plan, we are very conscious that not only are we not starting from scratch, but that new interpretive provision is also being added. While what has gone before can be updated in the normal course of refurbishment, new interpretive media are likely to have a considerable shelf-life which means they cannot be influenced in the foreseeable future. The impact, therefore, of our proposals is likely to be attenuated which is regrettable but probably inevitable given existing programmes of work and schedules.

6.1 Existing media

We comment below on key characteristics of the principal examples of existing and currently planned interpretive media.

Visitor experience and displays at Big Pit National Coal Museum

Big Pit is both a museum and a personal experience which tells the story of coal extraction in South Wales – and its world markets.

As the Visitor Experience Plan points out, most visitors to the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape spend time at Big Pit but few visit any of the other sites. Big Pit offers a substantial opportunity to find out about mining in Blaenavon and South Wales using its own site as the exemplar. It makes little reference to the nearby Ironworks or other facets and features of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape.

However, visitors can enjoy a very comprehensive experience within Big Pit ranging from taking refreshments in the former canteen to spending time at the detailed exhibition area in the former bath house, from going underground on a guided tour to seeing other live interpretation in, for example, the smithy. Clearly, for most people, this is as much as they wish to visit and absorb in a day.

The fact that the site is real, that real buildings and machinery are used, that the underground experience and other activities are real are all very positive elements. The lack of coal (other than underground) and other aspects of the original working environment do not appear to detract from visitors' enjoyment.

The exhibition panels concentrate largely on the human story and



Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Torfaen CBC

probably contain far more information and interpretation than most visitors can cope with; however, they introduce real characters, some well-known, which helps visitors relate to the story.

Personal interpretation at Big Pit National Coal Museum

Probably the most memorable part of the visit to Big Pit is the journey in the cage and the visit to the coal seams led by former miners. Characterisation is excellent, the experience of working in the conditions can at least be hinted at and, as it probably has few comparisons for most visitors, it is 'real enough'. The main challenge will be to maintain the standard of personal interpretation when there are fewer and fewer ex-miners to call upon to present it. However, we understand that the surface displays, which concentrate largely on the story of the people involved in coal mining, play some of the part which personal interpretation would be expected to provide.

The Pontypool & Blaenavon railway

The railway line here is the last working remnant of the important rail link that helped serve the coal and iron industry of Blaenavon by linking it to onward transportation, distribution to the north and to the Midlands. Only a short extension is currently in use but a further section is likely to be restored over the next three years.

As the railway does not operate in the off-season, we cannot comment on the experience of taking a journey but its role is an important one, particularly if interpretation is closely linked to the railways serving the coalmines and ironworks, with obvious reference to Big Pit. The route is obviously short and trains have been diesel-hauled but we understand a steam locomotive will be introduced soon. Steam trains are a very evocative element both for visitors as passengers and for those seeing the train within the landscape. The current railway yard appears not be interpreted in any way but interpretation of railway line in the landscape once the extension is completed provides an opportunity to include all elements of the railway experience.

Experience, displays and guided tour at Blaenavon Ironworks

The Blaenavon Ironworks were the first industrialised iron founding operations in South Wales and the site, with many of its original structures conserved, tells the story of the invention and development of the founding process.

Visitors to the Ironworks need a guided tour to get a good understanding of the complexity of the site and its various developments over its working years. The lack of unsupervised access to many key parts (eg the furnaces and the top of the water balance tower) for reasons of safety, coupled with the apparently ruinous condition of the furnaces and other buildings, diminishes the experience for most visitors. Interpretive panels on site help to a degree but need to be augmented and made more informative.

For many people, the most memorable aspect of the visit – apart from the scale of the furnaces and balance tower – will be to the cottages, and the realisation that workers really did live on site. The furnishing of the cottages at two different periods also needs the help of personal interpretation and the display panels upstairs are very text heavy. However, the human element is to the fore here as it is at Big Pit.



The exhibition area has a great deal of information and interpretation to offer but the panels would benefit from more contemporary presentation and more variety. The models are outstanding, to a large degree self-explanatory and the most effective part of the display. We understand that the local history displays on the upper floors of the cottages are to be replaced with new interpretation, and that there is a new leaflet for the furnished cottages currently in production. We have not seen the copy or design of these new materials.

Blaenavon Community Heritage and Cordell Museum

This is, in the best sense of the word, a 'local' museum, devised and developed largely by members of the community and its exhibits reflect local interests, enthusiasms and the availability of artefacts. The displays relating to Alexander Cordell provide an interesting insight into an author, albeit an incomer, who has helped to tell the story of the heydays of iron-founding. Overall, it is very much a people-oriented museum and helps to build a picture of the area's character.

Forthcoming displays at the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre

The planned exhibits and interactive displays in the former St Peter's School will provide a much-needed focal point for the interpretation of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape. The range of media proposed is wider, with considerable focus on opportunities for visitors to find out for themselves using electronic media. This will appeal particularly to children on both leisure and school visits. The performance space lends itself especially to storytelling activities, linked to the many characters through which much of the story will be told in the displays. Once again, the focus on people is excellent.

Goytre Wharf, Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal

Goytre Wharf, once a trans-shipment point for various raw materials and produce – particularly limestone for the limekilns at the Wharf, is now a visitor facility with a visitor centre and outdoor activities. The exhibition in the centre, and the interpretive media in the immediate vicinity, explain the importance of the Wharf and how it played its part on the periphery of what is now the World Heritage Site.

Events and activities

There are events, activities and guided walks arranged in many parts of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape and the neighbouring area within the National Park. Many have an implicit interpretive content, some explicit. Events and activities of various kinds are organised by, for example:

- Brecon Beacons National Park Authority
- British Waterways, principally at Goytre Wharf
- Cadw at Blaenavon Ironworks
- Local communities
- National Museum Wales at Big Pit National Coal Museum
- Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway
- Torfaen County Borough Council



Countryside event run by Torfaen BC Torfaen CBC

Guided walks and cycle tours

There is an extensive programme of guided walks and cycle tours led both by rangers and by volunteers. They include those organised by:

- Brecon Beacons National Park Authority
- Local communities
- Private enterprise
- Special interest organisations such as ornithological and rambling groups, the Brecon Beacons National Park Society etc
- Torfaen County Borough Council
- World Heritage Site Ranger

Many of the walks are well-defined in route and purpose and include the *Fossil Hunt*, *Birds of Hill and Moor*, *Mountain Archaeology*, and *Minescapes of the World Heritage Site*. Some of the walks attract considerable numbers of visitors and the Map and Compass training in the World Heritage Site is generally over-subscribed.

There will be an opportunity to consider the themes and contents of guided walks and tours more clearly based around people as a result of implementing the principles of this interpretive plan. This will take time to implement but can be done at the end of the natural life of existing excursions when new approaches are being considered.

Self-guided trails

There is now a wide selection of self-guided trails available as single-trail leaflets, as packs of leaflets or in book form. Most of the trail publications have at least some interpretive content, others provide a great deal. Among those available are:

- Chris Barber’s *Exploring Blaenavon* book which combines detailed historical material with instructions for following a series of trails
- Circular walks devised and published by Torfaen County Borough Council including, for example, *Cymafon Heritage Trail* and *Henllys Circular Walk*
- *Blaenavon Walks Pack* published by Torfaen County Borough Council including, for example, *The Whistle Stop Tour* and the two parts of *The Iron Mountain Trail*
- National Cycle Trail route
- Cadw’s walks guide

As with the guided walks, there will be an opportunity to consider the themes and contents of self-guided trails more clearly based around people as a result of implementing the principles of this interpretive plan. It will not happen all at one and will need a degree of tenacity and patience to see the scheme through.

Interpretive panels at car parks, picnic sites and communities

A variety of interpretive panels has been erected throughout the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape by national, local and community bodies. Those established by the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape WHS maintain a strong and consistent visual identity and this has been picked up in a number of other cases. There is over-reliance on text in many cases and the need for two languages always presents challenges to writers, designers and readers. Little of the text is layered to make it easier for visitors to use – there is no hierarchy of type sizes and layout to help them choose what they want to read, or read first, and all text would benefit from stronger editorial control.

There are no panels, with the exception of one at Big Pit, which take advantage of the many viewpoints around the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape; these could be combined with seating facilities to encourage visitors to take in the panoramas and begin to understand how to ‘read’ the landscape. For example, the car park for the railway has excellent views over the central portion of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape and offers an opportunity to interpret the links between railway and the wider industrial landscape.



Car Park at Blaenavon RKE

Similarly there is no longer a panel at Keeper's Pond.

Govilon Heritage group has also installed interpretation panels. These are outside the WHS and therefore do not use the WHS brand, although there are echoes of the brand in their design. If other communities are considering similar installations, a visual as well as a thematic link would be beneficial. The Govilon panels would also benefit from editing of text and less formal design although their content, like those in the WHS, is intrinsically interesting.

Printed publications

There is a range of publications available describing and, in many case, interpreting all or parts of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape; these include:

- Big Pit National Coal Museum guide book which is a comprehensive publication that gives much background information as well as describing Big Pit itself. It would be of greater benefit to the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape if it made rather stronger reference to it and its key elements, including the Ironworks, as part of a short section on 'context'. It should not, of course, try to inform visitors in detail about other sites, rather it should encourage them to visit these sites in order to widen their awareness and understanding of the wider story.
- Blaenavon Walks Pack which is an attractive set of leaflets and on the whole they provide a reasonable balance of orientation, information and interpretation. They would benefit from a little more editing and some correction of minor errors.
- Blaenavon Community Heritage and Cordell Museum leaflet which is a useful introduction to the Museum and the author of *Rape of the Fair Country* and many other historical novels; it also includes a brief description of the town itself and the role of people in developing it.
- Blaenavon town centre map which gives a brief history of the town's commercial centre and its people.
- Blaenavon World Heritage Site map / leaflet which details places and features of interest and paraphrases the 'testimony to human endeavour' that the landscape represents.
- Blaenavon Ironworks and World Heritage Landscape guide book which is a scholarly and detailed description of the site, its history, the role of those who devised, developed and worked in it and includes a tour of the industrial landscape in whose context the Ironworks sit. Its illustrations and photographs are of a high quality.
- Blaenavon Ironworks workers' cottages leaflet.
- Heritage News – the newsletter of the Blaenavon World Heritage Site.
- *An introduction to Goytre Wharf*, published by British Waterways, which is an extremely well-illustrated interpretive map and one of a series interpreting 'flagship' sites operated largely for visitors' benefit. It makes use of past and present personalities.
- *The Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal*, published by British Waterways, which is a canal-users' guide to the waterway.
- Other commercial and community publications.
- Walks leaflets.

The publications come from a number of different organisations and are not all branded, therefore, with the WHS brand. This is probably of less importance to visitors than it is to the sponsors of the WHS, but using the brand as a 'marker', even by publishers with only informal links, helps to maintain a consistency of message to visitors and to embrace all that they can enjoy within the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape.

As with much other media, some of the publications would benefit from even stronger reference to people although most make more of the human contribution than is evident at other sites.

Electronic media – websites

There is a selection of good websites where potential visitors can learn about the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape and the contiguous areas. These include sites sponsored by or relating to:

- Big Pit National Coal Museum
- Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, World Heritage Site
- Brecon Beacons National Park
- Cordell Country
- The Fforest Fawr Geopark
- Monmouthshire County Council website
- Torfaen County Borough Council
- Blaenavon World Heritage Centre, as part of the WHS website
- Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales
- Cadw
- Monmouthshire County Council

A number of these sites have links to others; most are purely informational and make little reference to the story behind sites.

Electronic media – other

- The proposed PDA system under development by RCAHMMW which will give a unique experience largely controlled by visitors themselves.

Cordell factor

The novels of Alexander Cordell provide a well-drawn picture of industrial and social life in the heyday of the ironworks in and around Blaenavon and Garnddyrys. They are, of course, a fictional interpretation but are nonetheless well-regarded for the accuracy of their portrayal of people and events.

The novels have spawned a minor industry in themselves with books about Cordell himself, the



E-trail on pdas at the World Heritage Centre RKE

establishment of Cordell Country with its trails, and interpretive panels in some car parks, a variety of associated leaflets and constant references and quotations on interpretation panels and similar media. Cordell's work is a considerable asset to interpreting the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape largely because of the characters he uses in telling his stories.

Cordell has been a great asset to the story of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape but the appeal of his novels is likely to wane over time although the stories will still be valuable in illustrating the area's past history. A study by John Brown & Co and others in the early 90s suggested that the Cordell factor could be usefully exploited but 15 years on, it is inevitably a less powerful interpretive medium.

6.2 Linking existing and new interpretation

Our approach to the interpretation of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape and the use of characters to tell its stories allows the development of interpretive media to maintain and expand the approach already in use, or proposed, for sites and other interpretive facilities. Our proposals will take advantage of existing characterisation and will include recommendations in relation to visual consistency as well, in order to strengthen the 'Blaenavon Brand' in marketing and interpretive terms.

We have already suggested that the 'branding' of the WHS should be a widely used as possible to incorporate all sites and features within the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape without implying that all come under the jurisdiction of the WHS. The fact that the branding is based around a person rather than a thing is one of the contributory factors to our proposals that the whole interpretive approach should be people-based rather than based on place, site, artefact or abstract topics.

In addition to branding, however, is the need, where appropriate and without overdoing it, to remind visitors *why* the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape is a World Heritage Site rather than just that it is, and *how* it came to achieve that international status. It is a classic case of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts – but that needs to be explained.

We would expect, too, that our interpretive approach for the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape could be linked to the work of the Forgotten Landscapes project.



Interpretation panel at Foxhunter car park RKE

7 Audiences for interpretation

The section on the Blaenavon visitor experience has set out the existing and expected market for the individual and collective attractions and facilities in the area. In terms of interpretation itself, we would propose that the following broad audience groups are those that should be considered as the primary targets for interpretation. Too detailed an analysis of target audiences is unproductive because, in reality, it is not feasible or practicable to offer interpretation at the variety of levels, style and content to meet each niche of the market. However, it is possible, and indeed desirable, to 'layer' interpretation in a number of ways to help satisfy different audiences' principal needs.

Broadly, therefore, the audiences for interpretation will be:

- Family groups comprising grandparents, parents and children in a variety of combinations including single parents with children;
- Adults, usually in pairs or small groups, primarily but not exclusively of middle age or older;
- Adult groups, primarily but not exclusively of middle age or older;
- Educational groups, primarily of primary and secondary school pupils;
- Adults (including students) with a variety of special interests directly or tangentially related to the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, ie all those from experts in industrial history to those seeking outdoor recreation.

Within all these broad audience groups, local people have as important a place as visitors from outside the area.

In terms of focussing interpretation that is likely to be seen, if not always used, by most visitors, the principal target group must be the family, with appropriate layering to help meet the needs of all those from experts to children. However, this interpretive provision needs to be augmented appropriately by provision of, or access to, detailed information and interpretation on the one hand, and to simplified and entertaining interpretation on the other. However, interpretation for children on leisure visits is substantially different from curriculum-related teaching to meet specific needs.

Cost considerations, both in absolute and in comparative terms, play an important role in deciding on the scope and variety of interpretive media, including that designed for schools and other purely educational markets.

8 Interpretive approach, structure and plan

Here we set out our strategic approach to interpreting the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape. It should be read in the context, particularly, of the preceding comments on the visitor experience as a whole, and also against our appraisal of interpretive resources and existing facilities which the section on the visitor experience has summarised.

The main elements are:

- The interpretive philosophy and concepts which we believe should underpin the interpretation strategy, ie *the intellectual framework – our approach*
- The interpretive themes (or storylines) which stem from the philosophy and which will guide the form of the interpretation strategy, ie *the thematic framework – our structure*
- The interpretive topics and mechanisms which will give direction to implementing the interpretation strategy, ie *the practical framework – our plan*

The eleven characteristics of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, presented at the start of the Visitor Experience Plan, are the driving force for the interpretive strategy because, without adequate explanation and contextualisation, the stories that are inherent in these characteristics are not easily understood, appreciated and remembered by the majority of people. They cannot 'read' the landscape easily nor comprehend the crucible of forces that combined to create this Blaenavon Industrial Landscape. This point has been well emphasised in the section on the visitor experience.

Our overall methodology for this Interpretation Plan follows the approach which Touchstone has developed for clients and for academic use to amplify and extend the principles first articulated by Freeman Tilden. In essence, the creative elements (as distinct from the research elements within the interpretive appraisal) of the approach encompass:

- Confirming interpretive purposes (8.1)
- Establishing interpretive aim and objectives (8.1)
- Creating interpretive concepts (8.1)
- Determining interpretive themes or storylines (8.2)
- Determining interpretive mechanics and media (9)

In our definition of the boundaries for interpretation of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape there are areas of overlap with the interests (and land areas) of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and British Waterways' Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal. Where interpretive media are being considered, reference should be made to the relevant interpretive strategies to ensure that common goals are being served as far as possible.

8.1 The intellectual framework – our approach

Interpretive purposes

The purposes of interpretation, in general, can be paraphrased as follows (the description 'visitors' includes local people in this context). They are to:

- **Engage** visitors' attention and to relate to their knowledge and experience
- **Enlighten** visitors by providing revelation and explanation

- **Enthuse** visitors and provoke further interest
- **Entertain** visitors and provide a satisfying experience
- **Enrich** visitors' lives and extend their horizons

Interpretive aim and objectives

The overall aim for interpreting the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape can be expressed as to:

- Invite visitors and local people to share in the international importance of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape by helping them to understand, appreciate and enjoy its unique industrial and cultural heritage and its status as a World Heritage Site.

The interpretive objectives for the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape can be expressed in the following aspirations which are to:

- Ensure as far as possible that visitors and local people are aware that Blaenavon is a World Heritage Site; they appreciate the significance of this designation of 'outstanding universal value'; and that they understand the principal industrial and cultural reasons for the designation
- Encourage visitors and local people to explore the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape and to understand the relationships between the various key sites
- Explain to visitors and local people how and why the area developed as it did as a formative part of the Industrial Revolution
- Help visitors and local people to 'read' the present-day landscape and relate it to its agricultural and industrial past and present
- Introduce visitors to the many stories of entrepreneurs, working people and communities which make up the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape
- Encourage visitors and local people to extend and develop their interest and relate it to their own background knowledge and experience.

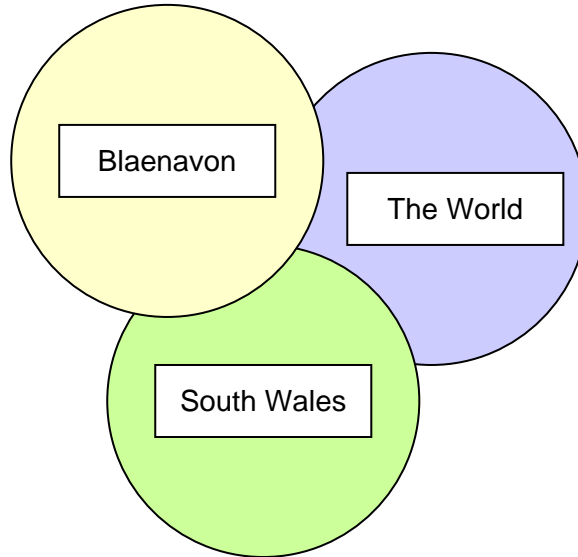
Creating interpretive concepts – three worlds

Our overall interpretive concept is predicated by the need always to draw the stories of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape together, to avoid the separations and divisions that exist at present. For this reason, we have used as a working (and possibly public) mechanism, the idea of 'three worlds'. This is not strictly a thematic approach, it is conceptual; we deal with themes later.

Geographic worlds

In one sense, Blaenavon was its own world, remarkably self-contained in many ways and, for the majority of working people living there during its industrial zenith, the only world many of them knew. However, Blaenavon was also part of the world of South Wales, not only because of broadly parallel developments throughout 'the valleys' but also because of the exporting opportunities along the coast. In turn, this put Blaenavon into a whole-world context industrially and one in which it now rests in terms of its contribution to world heritage. These three worlds provide us with the basis of our interpretive philosophy and provide the springboard for conceiving the interpretation within, generally, a series of three interlocking spheres or circles of influence or activity.

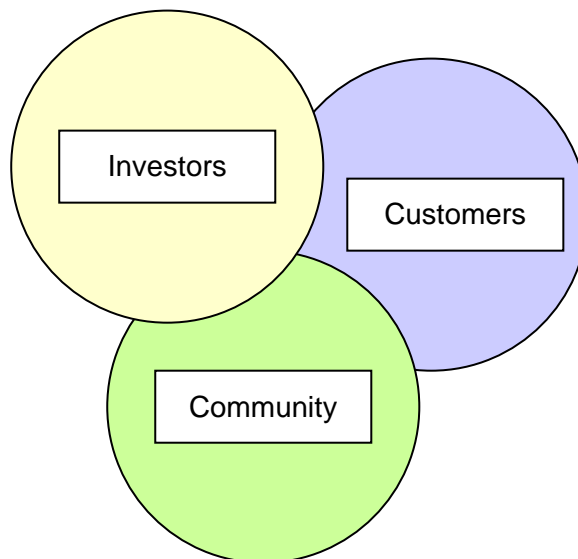
The specific inter-relationships between each of these ‘three worlds’ has been well-documented and we will make reference later to the key elements when considering interpretive themes and topics. The driving force behind each of these worlds is people – the people who discovered and developed the winning of iron and coal – and they form an integral part of the ‘three worlds’ – as we articulate in greater detail later on.



Commercial worlds

Extending the philosophy beyond the physical perspectives of landscape, region and planet, there is a second group of ‘three worlds’ which can be identified as of paramount importance in considering the interpretation of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape and that is the series of principal human relationships linking:

- The iron and coal masters and related inventors, investors, entrepreneurs and engineers, broadly speaking the **instigators and protagonists**
- The employees, their families and local services, summed up as the **working community** and
- Those to whom the end products were destined, either unchanged, or with added value, **the customers**, national and international.

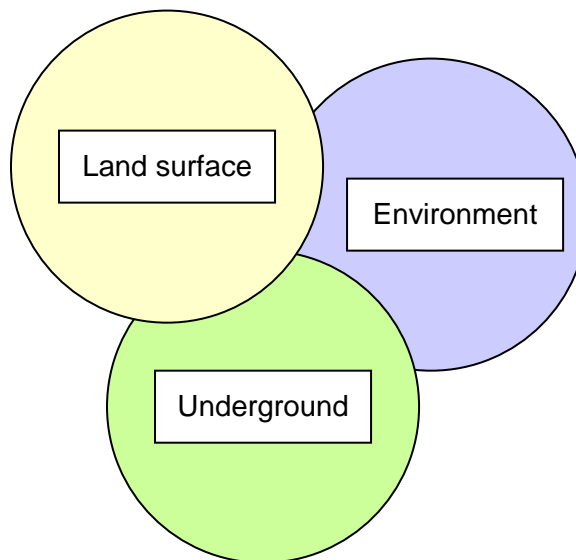


Economic stability needs a balance among all three – the customer must get sufficient value, the workers must get adequately paid and the investors must make a profit. One strand of the Blaenavon story will clearly relate what happens when one or more of these needs is out of kilter with another, or both, such as working conditions and the truck payment system.

Working worlds

A third series of worlds relates to the physical environment, as modified to suit industry or as a consequence of industry. There are many inter-related factors which combine to tell the whole story – including, of course, the people, their origins and aspirations – and, for simplicity, we have treated them as ‘three worlds’ again, all of which are very dramatic:

- The surface world on which much of the industry took place, where the community lived and lives, and present-day restored and re-juvenated countryside;
- The underground world that was mined for the raw materials, tunnelled for transportation and, importantly, which was both a receptacle for and provider of water, and which can still be visited in places; and
- The ever-present contaminated environment (the ‘air’) around and above the workings and communities where smoke, gases, the glow of furnaces, noise and other ‘pollution’ affected the community and those who worked in the industries and which is now, of course, completely changed (but there are cross-links to global warming).

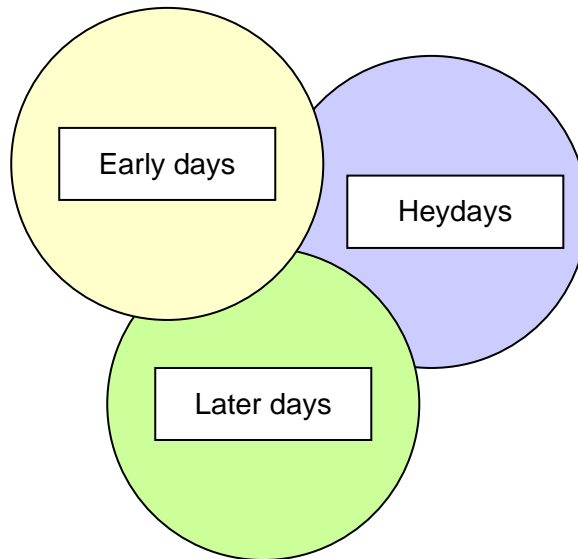


Time worlds

A final series of worlds relates to establishing a broad series of timeframes in which to set the story of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape. We propose that these should be, broadly:

- Early days – the era from prehistoric times to the late 18th century
- Heydays – the flowering of the Industrial Revolution to the mid-20th century

- Later days – the post-industrial era including the present day.

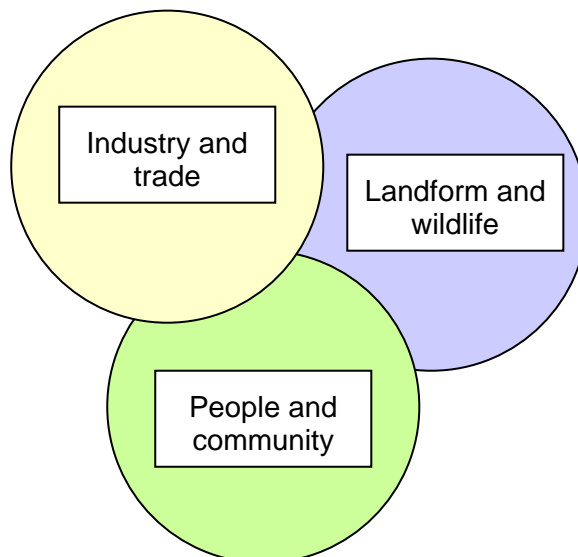


Storyline worlds

It would be easy to go on constructing 'three worlds' but we feel that restricting them to these four contains the overall approach which otherwise could become too dispersed and complex. In essence, the three groups represent three interlocking but distinct themes or storyline strands:

- Industry and trade
- People and community
- Landform and wildlife.

The role of people in each of these groups is paramount, formative and self-evident – even the land and wildlife as it now is results substantially from human intervention and its appreciation is, of course, by people. We have identified three 'matching' storyline strands which are set out later, effectively as themes, and we propose to develop the presentation of these themes around people telling stories in a variety of ways and situations.



Interpreting the industrial landscape through its people

We believe that the interpretation of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape will be most effectively (and enjoyably) achieved by using a people-based approach – relating the whole story of the people whose endeavour transformed the area and achieved its industrial and commercial success. Visitors are better able to relate to stories about places, artefacts, processes and events when they are told through the eyes of those involved and not simply related as history. The use of key named and profiled characters will help visitors to understand the way the landscape has developed and the lives of the people who lived and worked in it.

Because people have a crucial part in all three storyline strands, we have identified specific characters who could ‘tell’ the stories and the timeframe in which they would be placed. We have drawn on the planned exhibition in the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre in the former St Peter’s School in choosing a number of its selected characters and, indeed, on one of the families that lived at the Ironworks. This means that our ‘people’ and existing characters are coordinated to help all the interpretation to be inter-related and cohesive. We would also recommend that the graphic (and costumed) presentation of the whole list of characters will reflect the style of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape branding which gives such prominence to the person, rather than the place. It is a strong graphic style that works well in a variety of media.

Interpretation is best delivered when it forms part of a conversation which, ideally, is a person-to-person interactive situation but can be two experts in discussion, an expert or an interpreter talking with an individual or addressing a group, an audio-visual presentation that is enjoyable to watch, an audio tour which is engaging to follow, website pages that offer answers to questions as well as or even better than graphic panels and printed publications. The ‘conversation’ and ‘discussion’ to which we refer are an interpretive device or technique to be used in a variety of media, including print, electronic and audio, rather than a simple verbal dialogue.

For the purposes of developing the storylines, we have devised proposals for many opportunities where characters could ‘converse’ on interpretive panels, in print, in various presentations and, where feasible, as actors / interpreters in live conversations with visitors to the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, school parties or classroom groups. The success of the last example has already been proved by many sites in addressing both the general public and schools. We have left the selection of contemporary characters to the various organisations and sites involved so that they can be either real, such as the local rangers and former miners in Big Pit, for example, or representational, ie fictional, characters.

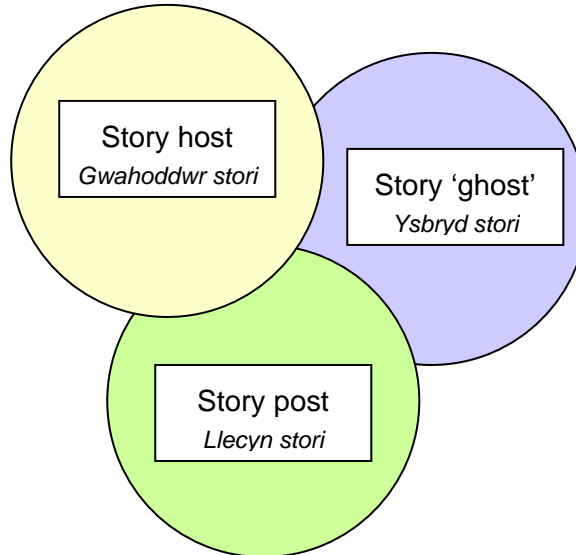
We believe the flexibility offered by the storytellers in conversation or direct delivery – in whatever situation – will allow the chosen storylines, themes and topics to be delivered with much more force and success than more conventional presentations, and provide more support for them. The implications for administration and cost of employing and training people – even as volunteer – to be the characters means that is reality a great deal of reliance will need to be put on graphic and other representations of personal stories and ‘conversations’. We see no problem in this; it is an approach we have used on other sites in different ways where the availability of live interpretation is limited or non-existent.

Three channels of communication

We have devised three broad categories or channels for telling the stories:

- **The story host / gwahoddwr stori** – a present-day real person or representational but fictitious person who conveys one or more of the storylines either on his or her own or in ‘conversation’ with a character, a ghost, from the past

- **The story ghost / ysbryd stori** – a real and, in most cases, a representational person from the past who conveys one of the storylines either on his or her own or in ‘conversation’ with another ghost (of the same period) from the past
- **The story post / llecyn stori** – a site, indoor or outdoor, visual, aural or electronic, where one or more of the storylines is used to tell the relevant story or stories.



8.2 The thematic framework – our structure

Themes and sub-themes are useful mechanisms for interpreters in devising how to tell the story of a site to visitors; they can infuse the interpretation itself but are not generally articulated beyond the planning stage.

We suggest that the overarching theme, or storyline, for the interpretation of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape should reflect the site’s strap-line:

- The Blaenavon Industrial Landscape is a living testimony to human and industrial endeavour in the way it epitomises and reflects the dramatic changes in life and work that characterise the unique role of South Wales in the earliest days of the Industrial Revolution.

Three supporting sub-themes, effectively expansions of the main theme, are the three storylines which we propose using to support the whole-site interpretation. These should be treated as ‘internal’ descriptions which will be reflected in interpretation rather than presented directly to visitors as such.

Theme / Storyline A: The story of industry and trade

- *The Blaenavon Industrial Landscape is a unique and remarkable relic of the development of heavy industry and its resultant economic and commercial achievement at the forefront of the industrial revolution.*

Key elements in this storyline would include, for example;

- Early iron workings and coal extraction from the Iron Age to the late 18th century

- The foundation and development of ironworks and associated coal, clay, sandstone and limestone extraction
- The impact of early innovators and entrepreneurs such as Hill, Hopkins and Pratt
- The exploitation of water and the creation of reservoirs
- The impact of later innovators and entrepreneurs such as Gilchrist
- The area's role in the wider Industrial Revolution and its environmental and social consequences
- The area's links with industrial development around the world, eg in Ukraine and other parts of Europe
- The partially-separate expansion of the area's coal industry, exemplified by Big Pit
- The growth of complementary and other industries such as brickmaking
- The rapid development of transportation infrastructure initially of tramroads and canals and latterly of railways and roads, partly in association with the ports of Newport and Cardiff
- The subsequent decline of extractive and associated heavy industry in the area and in South Wales as a whole, in contrast to expansion to other parts of the world
- The continuation of 'traditional industries' (eg Doncaster's Foundry) and the development of the post-industry economy
- Blaenavon as a microcosm of South Wales.



Blaenavon Ironworks RKE

Theme / Storyline B: The story of people and community

- *The Blaenavon Industrial Landscape is a powerful evocation of human endeavour, toil and achievement within the industrial, commercial and transportation operations and in the wider community which survives to this day.*

Key elements in this storyline would include, for example;

- The early human history of the area and the archaeological evidence
- Land use, agriculture and other rural trades before and during the Industrial Revolution
- Those involved in pre-Industrial Revolution iron working, coal and limestone extraction

- The entrepreneurs, iron masters, coal owners and transportation developers and their importing of expertise
- The men, women and children of the workplace and their places of origin
- The export and impact of ideas, skills and labour around the world
- The imposition of company shops and associated poverty following the Truck Acts
- The essential economic and supportive role of women, at work and home, throughout the period of industrial development
- The Chartist and other movements and the rise of trades unions, the lack of universal suffrage or any other kind of representation
- The inadequate provision of education facilities, the later founding of company schools for workers' children and the establishment of universal education
- The all-embracing place of, particularly, non-conformist religious denominations as expressions of identity, social position as well as belief
- The role and impact of religion in general on social mores and education
- The development of working men's institutes primarily for social, educational and self-improvement purposes
- The growth of welfare and other subscription funds to support working people in sickness and difficult times
- The effect on community health of unchecked diseases, extended toil, pollution, lack of adequate nutrition and social conditions
- The increasing importance of domestic, public and commercial architecture in expressing social and cultural aspirations
- The changing role, importance and impact of recreation and social activities
- The widespread interest in, and consequential effect of, Alexander Cordell's novels
- The changing face and regeneration of the community.

Theme / Storyline C: The story of landform and wildlife

- *The Blaenavon Industrial Landscape represents the overwhelming impact of unrestrained industrial development on the environment and the steps taken to safeguard historical features while enhancing and conserving the countryside.*

Key elements in this storyline would include, for example;

- The intrinsic interest of the geology of the area, but, importantly, the crucial role of its components in the development of extractive and related industries
- The landforms of the area and the consequential creation of, among other features, deep river valleys allowing for water supply and transportation routes
- The use of sandstone, clay, limestone, iron ore, coal and water from prehistoric times
- Changes in the landscape, particularly the loss of post-glacial tree cover, as a result of agriculture, including heavy stock rearing, and early industry
- Lord Abergavenny's estate, grouse moors and land management
- The long tradition of common land and the continuing role of commoners in maintaining the appearance of the landscape

- Small holdings, food and timber production, lime works and other rural trades
- The pollution of the air, land and watercourses
- The recovery of the landscape, including increased tree cover, and maintenance of small holdings
- The present ecology of the area and its conservation under statutory and other provision.

From our experience of working at a variety of sites, from comments in the brief and from subsequent meetings, we believe that these storylines, and the key elements within them, will allow the interpretation of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape to be articulated by means of the 'people-based approach' we have referred to above.

If we return to the overall objectives for interpretation, then we can say that people, whether real or fictional characters, are best placed to:



Above Cwmavon RKE

- **Engage** with visitors and local people, to gain their attention and to relate the story of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape to knowledge and experience they bring from their own lives
- **Enlighten** visitors and local people by revealing the human stories embodied in the present (and past) landscape and explaining the many interlocking stories of men, machines, money and misery
- **Enthuse** visitors and local people by the way they involve them in the storytelling and provoke them to take further interest for themselves
- **Entertain** visitors and local people by making the storytelling experience fun, and in that way helping to provide a satisfying experience
- **Enrich** visitors' and local people's lives by giving them a deeper understanding of the site's heritage and in that way extending their horizons of knowledge and awareness.

These themes provide an opportunity to embrace a whole range of topics as above.

9 The practical framework – our interpretive plan

This section is divided as follows:

- Developing the storylines, characters and timeframes
- Overall conventions for employing characters in storytelling
- Mechanisms and media.

9.1 Developing the storylines, characters and timeframes

Storylines

The storylines are those identified earlier – effectively the three thematic bases for interpretation and the headings under which we identified interpretive resources. All the storylines overlap, as the diagram indicated, and this means that in telling stories, present-day interpreters and ‘ghost’ characters will, and must, draw from the other two thematic bases in order to tell their own stories in context. Context is vital, which is why we identified the various ‘worlds’ earlier – each showing the overlap of topics within any one broad subject area. These ‘worlds’ diagrams are for the benefit of interpreters although there may be times when they can be used directly in interpretation with visitors.

Within each storyline, of course, there is the opportunity to pick on specific-sub themes which may relate to the key elements we identified above under each storyline description or other topics which have not been specifically included.

Storyline A: The story of industry and trade

Blaenavon Industrial Landscape is a unique and remarkable relic of the development of heavy industry and its resultant economic and commercial achievement at the forefront of the industrial revolution.

Characters, presentations and conversations

We propose that the five representative characters, the ‘story ghosts’, should be:

- **Thomas Hill**, the 18th century entrepreneur
- **Sidney Gilchrist-Thomas**, the industrial innovator
- **Timothy McCarthy**, an ironworker
- **Margaret Thomas**, a child mine worker
- **Lewis Browning**, a 20th century miner.

We propose that the prime topic should be:

- Ironworking and mining in the Blaenavon area – with all its concomitant industrial and commercial constituents.

This would allow for **Thomas Hill** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- How he came to instigate and develop Blaenavon Ironworks and why.

It would allow for **Sidney Gilchrist-Thomas** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- Why improvements to smelting processes were essential for commercial success and how he achieved it.

It would allow for **Timothy McCarthy** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- The working life of the ironworker associated with living in a company house

It would allow for **Margaret Thomas** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- The work children did in the mines, the daily grind, injuries and illnesses and the few opportunities for play.

It would allow for **Lewis Browning** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- How mining changed over the years without lessening, much, the toil and danger of the work with only limited machinery in later years.

And it would also allow for the one-to-one 'conversations' between any two of the 'story ghosts', in whatever medium, discussing, for example:

- The great changes in industrial practice and the slow changes in workers' conditions.

Storyline B: The story of people and community

Story strand: *Blaenavon Industrial Landscape is a powerful evocation of human endeavour, toil and achievement within the industrial and commercial operations and in the wider community which survives to this day.*

Characters, presentations and conversations

We propose that the five representative characters, the 'story ghosts', should be:

- **Abraham Harry**, a local smallholder / miner
- **[Axxx Bxxx]**, a 19th century teacher
- **[Cxxx Dxxx]**, a brick worker;
- **[Exxx Fxxx]**, a trade union officer
- **Alexander Cordell**, the 20th century writer

We propose that the prime topic should be:

- The living conditions, social life, hardship and hopes of the people employed by the various enterprises, and other organisations within the community of Blaenavon.

This would allow for **Abraham Harry** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- How he carried on the tradition of farming on the Bloreng, with part-time mining for coal and iron and how life changed in the later 18th century.

It would allow for **Axxx Bxxx** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- How the entrepreneurs set up, or supported, schools and gave children the opportunity for education, initially alongside work, in Blaenavon.

It would allow for **Cxxx Dxxx** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- How women, stopped from working in the mines, were employed in the brickworks with just as long, tiring and often dangerous work and their role in the local economy.

It would allow for **Exxx Fxxx** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- How the Chartists and others began the struggle for workers' rights and how the unions established negotiation practices as well as social and welfare benefits.

It would allow for **Alexander Cordell** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- How he resolved to tell the people's story of the Blaenavon area, and Garnddyrys in particular, and to illustrate the dependence of labour of the great entrepreneurs

And it would also allow for the one-to-one 'conversations' between any two of the 'story ghosts', in whatever medium, discussing, for example:

- The great changes in social life, the work of teachers and preachers, midwives and shopkeepers, the Truck Acts and slow improvements in conditions.

Storyline C: The story of land and wildlife

Blaenavon Industrial Landscape represents the overwhelming impact of unrestrained industrial development on its environment and the efforts to safeguard historical features while restoring the countryside.

Characters, presentations and conversations

We propose that the five representative characters, the 'story ghosts', should be:

- **Lord Abergavenny**, the local landowner
- **[Gxxx Hxxx]**, a canal boatman
- **Mrs Billy Harris**, publican's wife at Garnddyrys Inn
- **Dai Laffyn**, an anonymous poacher
- **[Kxxx Lxxx]**, a 20th century commoner and social worker / welfare worker.

We propose that the prime topic should be how the Blaenavon area was used for its natural resources and its landform to provide for industry and how it changed out of all recognition.

This would allow for **Lord Abergavenny** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- Why he sold his land to the new entrepreneurs in order to benefit from the Industrial Revolution and how this changed its use and appearance from that of an agricultural and sporting estate.

It would allow for **[Gxxx Hxxx]** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- How the natural lie of the land allowed for the building of canals which, as the railways did later, transformed the whole movement of raw materials and goods.

It would allow for **Mrs Billy Harris** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- Why the hill-top pub was established in what was still countryside to serve the workers at Pwll-du, on Hill's tramroads and at the farriers next door.

It would allow for **Dai Laffyn** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- How life changed for the opportunist when the grouse moor became an industrial site but how there were still ways of feeding a starving family at the expense of the rich.

It would allow for **[Kxxx Lxxx]** explaining, in whatever medium, for example:

- How the commoners still maintained their rights and their grazings despite all the changes and how local people began to have more time to walk the hills.

And it would also allow for the one-to-one 'conversations' between any two of the 'story ghosts', in whatever medium, discussing, for example:

- The great changes in the life and appearance of the moorland areas around Blaenavon and the Blorenge in particular which continued to provide at least a part-time living and informal leisure facilities.

The following chart sets out the chosen 'story ghosts' which have been selected to provide as wide as possible a range of voices across the various 'worlds' we identified earlier, a mix and men, women and children, a variety of backgrounds and of employment. Several of the 'story ghosts' are those to be used in the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre and one, Mr McCarthy, is featured with his family at Blaenavon Ironworks. A number have still to be identified by name.

Together with the present-day 'story hosts', they should allow for coverage of all aspects of the various storylines, either directly or contextually.

Blaenavon Industrial Landscape : Table of characters			
<i>Name</i>	<i>Male / female</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Period</i>
Storyline A: The story of industry and trade			
Thomas Hill	Male	Entrepreneur, founder of Blaenavon Ironworks	Early days
Sidney Gilchrist Thomas	Male	Industrial innovator and improver	Heydays
Timothy McCarthy	Male	Ironworker, resident of Engine Row, Blaenavon	Heydays
Margaret Thomas	Female	Child mineworker	Heydays
Lewis Browning	Male	Miner at Big Pit	Later days
Storyline B: The story of people and community			
Abraham Harry	Male	Local smallholder / part-time miner	Early days
Axxx Bxxx	Female	Schoolteacher	Heydays
Cxxx Dxxx	Female	Ex-coal miner, brick worker	Heydays
Exxx Fxxx	Male	Trade union officer	Heydays
Alexander Cordell	Male	Novelist and publiciser of the Blaenavon industrial era	Later days
Storyline C: The story of land and wildlife			
Lord Abergavenny	Male	Landowner	Early days
Geraint Hxxx	Male	Canal boatman or canal worker	Heydays
Mrs Billy Harris	Female	Wife of Garnddyrys Inn landlord	Heydays
Dai Laffyn	Male	Fictitious / anonymous poacher	Heydays
Kxxx Lxxx	Female	Commoner and social worker / welfare worker	Later days

In implementing the interpretive plan, alternative or additional characters may be considered; we have attempted to keep the number to a minimum but others that might be introduced, either as key characters or subsidiary ones could include:

- a tram supervisor who operates the inclines, eg at Llanfoist
- a carter's daughter from Clydach / Govilon / Llanfoist / Goytre Wharf
- a financier, possibly from the 19th century

- a geologist, possibly from the 20th century
- a doctor or nurse working with Blaenavon community
- a preacher from one of the non-conformist churches
- a railway locomotive driver on the Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway.

9.2 Overall conventions

Much of the approach involves using ghosts from the past, all (but one) of which are real people, which will help considerably to make their stories essentially believable. While the characters will have to be exaggerated gently, to give them immediate impact, they must not become caricatures. They must be a little larger than life but not distortions. The framework of characters allows for the addition (within reason) of other characters to suit particular situations; for example, a preacher or a midwife. It is likely other characters may emerge over time but they should be slotted into the existing storylines to keep the whole programme 'contained' and not dispersed.

For various reasons of balance but also reality, we have nominated ten men and five women, all of whom can give clear perspectives on their particular topics and ensure that the overall story that is told does not become a wholly male preserve although, for a long time, men dominated the scene. Clearly, many of the 'story ghosts' are real historical characters and have to be male but this is balanced by telling stories through the eyes of female members of families and other women in the community.



View over to Big Pit RKE

The 'story ghosts' do not all come from the same period; five are 18th century and three are 20th century. Obviously, suspension of disbelief will be needed in hearing or reading a conversation between 'story ghosts' from different periods or between present-day 'story hosts' and 'story ghosts'.

Each storyline has been kept as straightforward as possible in defining the 'strand', but each will allow for diversions and digressions, particularly to link in with some or all of the other storylines so that the three strands all contribute to a whole story and are not disparate parts.

In using 'story ghosts', the 'conversations' or presentations will be, of course, in the first and second persons which brings the benefits of personalisation and immediacy. It is perfectly possible to use this approach in print and graphic form as well as in live or recorded performances, but the choice of language will need to recognise that what appears to be 'written-down spoken speech' usually needs some modification to make it easily read and understood.

There will be many occasions when the use of characters may not be practicable or appropriate, for example when a ranger or walking guide leads a group and does not want to play the part of one or even several characters for a variety of reasons. What we are proposing is enabling rather than prescriptive and should not be seen as imposing a regimen which could be difficult to implement in all cases and could result in lack of confidence or simply awkwardness. However, in leading a walk, the ranger or guide could tell the story of different real or generic characters to amplify descriptions of the history and environment.

Since the 1980s, many sites have used costumed characters in various formats and guises, sometimes as first-person interpreters, sometimes simply speaking in the third person but adding a little 'atmosphere'. A leading site was Wigan Pier; Historic Royal Palaces (and many other similar sites) employ actor-interpreters for regular or occasional performances. Many sites employ staff in costume, for example Beamish. Llancaiach Fawr near Nelson has used staff in costume since its inception as a tourist attraction nearly 20 years ago.

We accept that this medium will not appeal to all visitors and we see a need for balance to meet differing needs. We are also concerned that present-day 'characters' may well simply be themselves – as are the miners at Big Pit. Visitors want to meet real people who speak for the place they are visiting, but they also need stories to be told and 'theatre' in its broadest sense is an enjoyable means of storytelling.

Some visitors will want to concentrate on the present day as the 'end' of the story, filling in the past in the context of the present; that approach should be used extensively. Equally, others like to suspend disbelief from time to time and the proposal for the use of characters – in print as well in person – will meet these needs. It is very much dependent upon the subject and which part of the chronology is being dealt with.

9.3 Mechanisms and media

Mechanisms

As we said earlier, it will be possible to use the 'story ghosts' in a variety of ways in a range of media. The mechanisms have to be kept simple however, but could include, for example:

- Spoken or written presentations by a single character ('story host' or 'ghost'), directed to an audience
- Spoken or written conversations between two (or three at most) 'story ghosts'
- Spoken or written conversations between present-day characters and the 'ghost' characters associated with them

- Spoken conversations between a ‘story host’ or ‘ghost’ and an audience
- Dramatic interludes involving ‘story hosts’ and ‘ghosts’.

Media

Illustrations and costumes

All the 15 ‘story ghosts’ will need to be defined graphically and the same style of illustrations used throughout. We would hope they could echo in style the male figure depicted in the logo of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape. The illustrations should be replicated as far as possible in any costumes worn. The proposed style is very simple, easily recognisable, and in gentle caricature, emphasising clear characteristics without resorting to lampooning or gross exaggeration. They should reflect the gentle amplification we proposed earlier for the characters as a whole.

‘Story hosts’, as we suggested earlier, can be either people in the current jobs, whether rangers, shopkeepers, publicans or tour guides, or they can play fictitious present-day characters in order to tell a part of a story. This will be a matter for development as the overall approach is implemented.

Printed material and graphic panels including ‘story posts’

While there is always a danger of text sounding slightly forced and ‘cheesy’, parts of leaflets and guide books could be written as personal narrative by ‘story hosts’ or ‘ghosts’ or, with care, ‘conversations’ between two characters, either between ‘hosts’ or between ‘ghosts’ or between a ‘host’ and a ‘ghost’. Characters should be illustrated using the style proposed above.

The technique could work very well in material prepared for children where illustrations should play a major part. In all cases, the cartoon-style format, using a series of successive ‘episodes’ could be used to advantage.

The ‘story posts’ proposal covers, in effect, a new range of interpretive panels or similar, either replacing some that exist or augmenting them, although we do not advocate adding more than absolutely necessarily to countryside furniture. Where panels are provided, for example at viewpoints where they largely do not exist, they should be linked to the provision of seating to concentrate the provision of constructed facilities in open countryside. We would also advocate the ‘signal sign’ style of interpretive panel used by the Forestry Commission, among others, where a slim panel is pivoted out from a fence post so that it can be read and then left to fall back into place afterwards. These can be placed at key locations with little or no intrusion.

In both printed material and graphic panels, text must be kept very short, illustrations should play a major part and content should be pared to the minimum for effective communication. The rigidity of design makes for convenience in adding new panels – the grid system controls the house style very effectively, but it is very formal and some pre-determined fluidity would make the panels, and the text, more user-friendly while still retaining a strong and uniform style.

More layering of text to create headlines (ideally provocative), short bold introductory paragraphs and then more explanatory text is a tried and tested approach which is best seen in newspapers and magazines to gain, develop and hold attention. A block of text without this kind of variation within it looks daunting and uninviting. On all panels, text must be very short and needs the skills of an experienced writer to present a story and not relate a history.

The strictures on length of text do not apply in quite the same way, of course, to more substantial guide books and similar materials but the principles remain the same and good

illustrations and diagrams should always be used to augment, or where appropriate, replace text.

Panels in open country should be avoided if at all possible but an excellent way of providing them is to relate them to other infrastructure or 'furniture' such as fencing or seating where a micro-honey pot is established that provides overlooks, a place to rest or contemplate and to learn something of the immediate surroundings. There are also a number of ways of incorporating simple lift-up signs within large fence posts or similar posts without needing obtrusive panels. The Forestry Commission has pioneered this approach at many of its sites.

Websites

Website use of the characters provides for a wide variety of presentational styles which retain the essential style of the characters both in their manner and their appearance. Websites offer opportunities for, among other things, narrative, 'conversations', 'guided tours' and 'fly throughs', dramatic presentations or simply illustrative material. Most importantly, they provide for interaction, for interrogation of characters and for selection of material to meet particular interests.

Website use of the storylines should follow the rubric established for all other uses but should include links to other, more detailed, material and other sites.

Animations

Linked to websites, and indeed to graphic displays using cartoon techniques, are animations which even children are now able to do using software. This deceptively simple technique can often be extremely effective in telling a story and could well form part of the approach to educational materials. Animations have already been produced through workshops at Blaenavon and these could be expanded and new ones developed.

Audio tours / video tours / mobile phone tours / pda tours

Audio, video and mobile phone and PDA tours could all be presented by one or more individual characters within each tour, and could also involve conversations in the formats suggested earlier. The mobile phone / PDA tours, in particular, could offer users the choice of narratives or conversations for explaining strands of the story but this could also be programmed into audio and video tours.

As technology develops, particularly with the advancement of mobile phones into general communication tools, and the anticipated wider use of PDAs, the potential for storytelling using the characters increases considerably. It is likely that today's mobile phone will be tomorrow's normal information and communication mechanism, providing endless possibilities for integrating what is currently provided in audio and video tours, the internet, television and, indeed, conventional exhibitions.

Making film or video material from scratch is expensive and use can be made (with suitable permissions and arrangements) to incorporate elements from existing material. It has been suggested that some material from the Weatherman Walks programme might be used.

Meeting visitors

The more conventional delivery of welcomes, introductions, descriptions and information and so on,



Using pda-based e-trail at the World Heritage Centre RKE

usually by one person offers opportunities for wide use of staff assuming a particular role at given times, whether or not in 'costume' as 'story host' or 'ghost'. The content of their material would, of course, be personalised and it may well suit present-day interpreters more than the 'ghosts' given that the characters may well have to deal with present-day questions of all kinds. In this regard, staff may have to slip in and out of character to a degree for practical purposes.

Guided tours / walks / talks

In contrast, guided tours and walks, and specific talks (as distinct from everyday meeting with visitors) could all employ one (or more) 'story hosts' or 'ghosts' to help differentiate between, for example, and ranger's perspective of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, an engineer's and an archaeologists's. There is no reason why some leaders of tours and walks, including the many volunteers involved, and indeed presenters of talks, could not switch characters, effectively as 'one-person theatre'. On the other hand, many of those who currently run guided walks may not be comfortable with this kind of interpretation. Training can be very effective for those who like the approach but need encouragement expertise and confidence. However, it may be that only one or two will take up the challenge in the early days.

We would expect such presentations to be done in costume which might call for some improvisation – which the audience would enjoy if they are drawn into the 'play' themselves. It is a technique used very successfully at many historical sites and allows for interrogation of the character by visitors. It is open to adaptation at Big Pit (which already has the basis for the approach) and Blaenavon Ironworks, for example. These are all discrete sites, and this is a wide and diverse area so locations where this can take place is very important. Weather and wind can make acting very difficult and so the choice of location for such activities will be important. It will be a question of testing and trying and building up from small beginnings.

Conversations

Staged conversations, using two characters (in one of the formats proposed above) would be an extension of the 'one-person theatre' and could be employed as direct presentations or as guided tours / walks / talks, providing it did not impede visitors' opportunities to ask questions and, indeed, enter into the conversation at appropriate points.

'Street' theatre

A development of the conversations would be fully-prepared dramatic interludes involving a number of characters who could be played by a minimum of two actors or by more. The rules about who talks with whom could well be stretched for the benefit of creating a playlet that ranges over several storyline strands. 'Harry's Cut', prepared for British Waterways in the English Midlands, uses three actors all of one period, but there is no reason why 'story host' and 'ghost' characters should not inter-relate for dramatic effect.

This approach could, of course, extend to



Costumed guided walk Torfaen CBC

involving – particularly – children as an alternative to role playing mentioned below.

Educational material

We usually distinguish between interpretational and educational material as the first is used primarily during leisure visits while the latter is generally linked to curricular studies. However, the same characters would provide a very strong basis for good educational material of all kinds – printed, graphic, audio-visual, web-based and so on. Indeed, the practice of using characters is long-established in educational material and what works for children very often works, with modification, for adults (as distinct from the other way round, as Tilden pointed out).

Role-playing

Adults need a lot of encouragement and chivvying to role-play and it is often not worth the effort unless the actor / presenter has the necessary skills. However, children love role-playing and, as for educational material, the creation of strong storylines and characters offers a range of opportunities for role playing.

Events

The existing programme of events is an excellent one and the approach we advocate could easily slot into current plans as well as inspiring new ideas. We believe there is an opportunity to develop a Storytelling Festival (perhaps not so grandly-titled at first!) to encourage local people to develop their storytelling skills (as ‘hosts’ or ‘ghosts’) and to attract storytellers from elsewhere to show off their skills and approaches. The performance space at the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre would seem to be an excellent starting point, allied to chosen pubs and other places where people gather – the Big Pit café for example. In the future, as success and momentum develops, the Workmen’s Hall would provide a venue for a major storytelling event involving everyone from children to the elderly, local people to those from around the world. The value of storytelling as an interpretive medium is becoming increasingly recognised and is often more successful than exhibitions and displays that by their nature are static and often unchanged over years.

The storytelling event could be a nice counterpoint to the Blues event which is currently part of the annual programme.

Activities

Visitors taking part in informal recreation activity can easily be exposed, subtly, to good interpretation whether they are on canal canoe trips, caving or taking part in fossil hunts. They may come for pleasure and even excitement, but that is no reason why they should not learn something of their natural and cultural surroundings – from why is there a canal in the first place to what kind of rock was the cave formed in and how. It is a matter of presentation, of ensuring that the interpretive messages are an integral part of the wider story.

The use of two languages

Wherever printed interpretive media are concerned, there is generally a need – or at least a wish – to produce all text in Welsh and English. This puts additional demands on writers and designers already challenged by the demands of ‘disability discrimination’ legislation and practice. There is an inherent danger in discouraging visitors from reading what may appear to be a considerable volume of text half of which is not immediately relevant although, for some at least, there is interest in comparing the two languages. There is a strong argument for balancing ‘parallel’ text with ‘integrated’ text, ie where short passages in each language are put together as distinct from complete text in each language.

The onus is on writers to minimise the text required, to make use of headlines and short introductory paragraphs and to use picture captions (and pictures, therefore) to the full. Designers have to devise means of presenting the text in an appealing and readable form, using hierarchy of type size, contrasting (dark) colours and so on.

The use of further languages

When all printed and similar text is already presented in two languages, the addition of other languages to benefit visitors with little or no English (or Welsh) creates additional challenges for writer and designer. In the case of welcome panels and similar media, common practice is to add a line in chosen languages to acknowledge those who speak them, indicating where more help can be given. In the case of publications, one or two foreign language versions can be prepared either in full or in summary. A simple computer printed-out is often adequate. Some leaflets allow for several short language passages but the more each tries to do, the less appealing and more confusing it becomes for all. In the case of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, French versions of selected text would meet the needs of the large numbers of school visitors from France.

Electronic media allow for much greater flexibility but, as with all media, there are cost implications. Good translations cost substantial sums and must always be checked by native speakers of each language to ensure that the text is accurate and reflects current usage.

Meeting the needs of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995

The DDA 1995 puts a great deal of onus on operators of visitor attractions and providers of printed or electronic media. Not only do a range of requirements need to be met in terms of physical access but there are many sensory needs to be met too. A number of additional factors, such as social and cultural access, need to be taken into account also.

Physical access

In considering the provision of interpretation and its associated access and media, provision must be made for those with ambulatory difficulties. This will include the provision of easily-opened and negotiable doors and gates and appropriately graded and surfaced access routes and paths to accepted standards, such as those in *Countryside for all*, produced by British Telecom with The Fieldfare Trust. Any installation of interpretive media whether indoors or outdoors must allow them to be easily accessible to those in wheelchairs and to those with less severe ambulatory difficulties, as well as to parents with pushchairs, children and those below average height.

Sensory access

Many more people have sensory impairments than have physical difficulties and full recognition of these must be incorporated in any provision of interpretation. This often means 'belt and braces' approaches so that those with visual impairments can have an audio alternative, and vice-versa. The prime sensory impairment is of vision; in addition to the relatively small proportion of the visitor population who are blind, very many have impairments both on a graduated scale and of differing nature. Reasonable provision, to meet the majority of needs, involves the use of strong contrasting colours in provision of text and background, size and clarity of typeface, avoidance of 'tints' and text over pictures and so on.

Good lighting, ease of reading position, appropriate height levels for text panels and so on are some of the key considerations also, and there is now plenty of advice available to interpreters and designers on preparing universally-accessible graphic material. This

includes the use of Braille (where appropriate), tactile elements, raised lettering and symbols, three-dimensional displays and so on.

For those whose sight makes movement a challenge through blindness or poor vision, changes in surfaces, railings at appropriate heights and so on are all recommended. We would also expect any full-time or voluntary rangers on duty to be able to assist those who need help to move about. A training programme to include this and other elements of the interpretive and customer service provision may need to be instigated for staff and volunteers if it has not already been provided.

Where publications are issued, large print versions should be available at least on request (eg through on-the-spot computer printouts) and, ideally, audio versions. Audio versions of text on panels should be provided where practicable. These could be incorporated within the audio-tour that we have proposed.

For those with hearing impairments, any audio interpretation should be capable of volume control to increase sound levels. Induction loops should be used within visitor centres and, for the profoundly deaf, printed versions (or summaries) of the audio and MP3 tour scripts should be available, for example on laminated sheets in large print.

Impaired sense of taste and / or smell is not likely to affect interpretive media although a poor sense of touch could affect appreciation of stonework, sculptures, installations and so on.

Intellectual access

We use the term intellectual access to relate to those with learning difficulties, which range very widely from the largely unnoticed (by others) to the severely impaired. In practical terms, it is possible to do a great deal to improve accessibility and some of the factors introduced to meet physical and sensory needs apply in the case of intellectual needs as well – ease of access, clarity of graphics, good contrasts between text and background colours, approved typefaces, short lines, short sentences, an absence of jargon or technical terms and the use of plenty of images and illustrations.

One of the most common difficulties experienced by a large proportion (up to 30%) of the population is in reading. Interpreters often take for granted that visitors will have reasonable reading skills but then express surprise when people do not read carefully honed and presented text. Text needs to be kept to a minimum, it must be structured through a hierarchy of clear (but ideally catchy) headlines, introductory paragraphs in larger type and, if needed, follow up text at a readable size. The layout of good tabloid newspapers is a useful guide.

Use of references to familiar objects, experiences, events and so on aids understanding and this applies to all visitors. The techniques of storytelling, as old as civilization, should be employed as widely as possible as they provide the foundation for all our learning from childhood upwards. The power of the story does not lessen as we age although the content and presentation may do so.

Clear illustrations – not fussy diagrams – aid comprehension, and the use of characters that become immediately recognisable as ‘explainers’ helps many with learning difficulties to maintain attention and gain from the story being told. Our proposals for people-based interpretation will make a valuable contribution in this direction if carefully adapted. However, much will also depend on the interpretation being easily comprehensible to helpers who can do a second level of interpretation for those whose learning abilities are impaired.

Anything that is done to aid the comprehension by those with intellectual difficulties will also help the average visitor – if it is properly done and avoids ‘dumbing down’, a pejorative term used of interpretation by those, often knowledgeable only in their own subject and unwilling to recognize that others, like them, have much to learn of subjects not familiar to them.

An audio tour, or a more advanced hand-held video-supported tour, if carefully devised, will benefit those with learning difficulties, but personal interpretation, by full-time or voluntary rangers working with helpers, will be very effective, particularly if they use simple 'visual aids'. The Park has a good record of welcoming those with learning difficulties and the foregoing may not require more than limited development of existing facilities.

Cultural access

It is easier to meet physical and sensory needs, and even intellectual needs, than those that are culture-based. In the last case, more judgment comes into play as to what may or may not be culturally accessible. In the case of the stories relating to the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, it is not safe to assume that visitors, or even some local people, will have an awareness or knowledge of the wider cultural and social history of the area, and of the Wales into which the Blaenavon story fits, or of technical, engineering or other elements which are essential parts of the story.

For some people, the whole apparent complexities of the natural world are foreign to their cultural background and they need help to gain initial access which they themselves can build upon once their confidence has been supported. In both cases, young people often need more guidance as their cultural tethers are less developed.

Social access

Many of the same principles relating to cultural access apply to social access. Nature reserves and wider countryside interests as often seen as essentially middle-class, demanding an intellectual involvement beyond the normal ambit of many people but such facilities can be accessible with the right form of welcome and approach. All staff need to offer an inclusiveness of welcome, but this must also be reflected in the way the interpretation is devised and implemented if the study area, and the centres in particular, is to be an 'open house' to all. This applies to events and activities as well – they need to be aimed at a variety of audiences rather than always aiming at an all-embracing audience where there is a danger of trying to please everybody and ending up pleasing few.

Meeting specific needs

Much of what has been said about meeting the needs of those with, for example, learning difficulties applies to visitors as a whole, as we indicated at one point. Making access easy to all should be the aim, and in doing so this automatically embraces some at least of the specific requirements of special groups.

Families

Providing accessibility for families puts additional, but not insuperable, demands on interpretation designed primarily for an adult audience. Indeed, we would counsel an interpretive approach that considers children (of say 10 to 12) as a primary audience and then augments it for adults rather than trying to modify interpretation designed for adults. Many adult visitors neither want nor can absorb more than that aimed at the average ten to twelve year old child and, in targeting this age group, interpretation will embrace a much wider audience – as well as meeting other accessibility objectives.

Families with children need things to do and finding characters to act as icons for interpretation around the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, and including the visitor attractions, immediately provides attracting, appealing and easily-recognisable storyline links. In this context, our suggested characters could also be used for way-finding markers, activity points and so on.

Allied to this, family-oriented interpretive quizzes, treasure hunts and so on can be very simply and inexpensively devised – the quality of content is the more important element. For

example, audio tours could be devised to appeal to children as well as adults, with perhaps special 'kids' bits' as alternative elements both to catch children's attention and to provide a simpler interpretation where extra explanation is needed.

For young children, colouring-in sheets, raised illustrations for rubbing and similar devices still have their value and can be used to introduce topics that might otherwise be considered 'beyond' them. Such material needs to be carefully planned and prepared as part of the whole interpretive approach and not provided simply as diversionary entertainment. One medium would be to devise games based on the characters we have devised which could be played by families. These could be designed for use outside – linked to the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre – and could be along the lines of familiar board games that are adapted for the site such as snakes and ladders or ludo.

In catering for families, it is fair to assume that beyond the age of about twelve to fourteen, children on family visits need to be seen as part of the adult market at best or a separate and tricky sub-market; teenagers, as we note below, are a very different market from either children or adults. However, Big Pit already benefits from attracting these groups to its various activities and events and it is hoped that interpretation can be so integral to the experience of the site that learning and discovery will almost be 'by accident'!

Schoolchildren

The needs of schoolchildren, when coming on formal visits, are related to their curriculum. While many of the interpretive media prepared for children on leisure visits may be adaptable (and vice versa), it is important to involve schoolteachers in the preparation of educational material, which needs to be focused on specific topics and contexts. Again, such material need not be expensive but it should be devised as part of the whole interpretive exercise not only to meet its own needs but in order to make as much of it applicable or adaptable to other uses.

Young people

Many visitor attractions agonise over the difficulty in attracting young people, particularly teenagers, as well as many of those who are into their early twenties. In almost every other facet of life, this age group 'gang their ain gait', both subconsciously and deliberately and trying to gain their attention for what may appear gloriously irrelevant, such as the stories of an old and partly ruined church, or of the landed gentry's pastimes, are almost a lost cause, certainly for the majority.

Certainly it is possible to put on events that meet the interests of some young people but the most successful means of access to the stories is through active participation in activities, whether indoors or outdoors. Through these, with careful admixture of interpretation, stories can be told that relate directly to the territory young people are using if not always directly to the activities themselves.

The visitor attractions would attract more young people if their displays were aimed towards them but, even then, the number is likely to be few. In our experience, it is better to regard youngsters in these transition years as a potential audience once they have a wider appreciation of the world and their place in it and therefore a basis for relating with some real degree of awareness and understanding to the story of the study area. They are not a lost audience, simply one on extended leave.

Marketing support

It is essential that the interpretive approach is echoed in the marketing approach to ensure that expectations are neither wrongly raised nor met. The use of characters is one that will be of advantage in marketing and publicity terms as it will give a people-focussed approach

rather than one simply linked to landscape and buildings none of which are immediately easy to 'read' or put in context.

Marketing of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape in this way should extend into the Brecon Beacons National Park with which it overlaps to include the important areas not technically within the WHS but which are, in terms of the overall story, an integral part. That includes, of course, the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal.

9.4 Sample text / scripts

We have included a number of examples of text and scripts, using one or more characters, in different types of media in a later section of this report.

Sample text / scripts

We have provided three sample texts to demonstrate different ways of using various characters. The copy should be read for style, not accuracy, at this stage.

1 'Story ghost', on a 'story post' or interpretive panel (which should be well illustrated)

Mrs Billy Harris describing life at Garnddyrys Inn

Smoke gets in your eyes

When I was a child living up here on the Bloreng, we could see the sunshine (and the rain) every day. Then Mr Thomas Hill came along and built his forge at Garnddyrys. It belches out smoke day and night and if the wind is wrong, our pub smells like the furnace our customers have just left!

Garnddyrys turns pig iron from the Blaenavon Ironworks into wrought iron that is used for everything from horseshoes to rails to spades. Our next door neighbour, Gareth Pugh the farrier, makes dozens of shoes in a day for the horses that pull the trams on Mr Hill's Tramway. They carry the limestone they use in smelting.

Bill Harris asked me to marry him when he took on this pub, the Garnddyrys Inn. It was hard going in the early days but he said once the Forge really got busy, we would too. Now it's hard going keeping these thirsty men supplied with ale. And then there are the chickens and the pigs to look after, and the kids – the goat's and our own, of course!

We get men coming up the Pwll-du tunnel from Blaenavon with tramloads of iron for the Forge. They've got some kind of clever system over there, the balance tower they call it, that lifts up these great bars of iron, the pigs, from the ironworks floor so they can bring them here. Cast iron, from the pigs, is quite brittle.

The men at the Forge puddle the iron – they smelt it again to get rid of sulphur, I think, so that it can be worked without cracking. Then they roll it into rails and other products. It's backbreaking work. But watching a black smith working wrought iron, the stuff they make here, could keep me from my chores all day!

2 'Story ghosts', on an audio or PDA tour or on a hand-held bat, or leaflet

Timothy McCarthy in conversation with Geraint Hxxx, canal boatman, about the annual trip to Newport.

Newport here we come!

You must be Gxxx Hxxx, seeing you're in charge of the boat.

And who are you then, with your tribe of youngsters?

I'm Tim McCarthy and we all live in great luxury in Engine Row, next to the Ironworks.

Luxury is it then? I've heard otherwise, but at least you have a house and a short walk to work.

The wife complains she can never get the children's clothes clean with that smoke stack in the square beside us. Sure, there's grime everywhere.

Well at least my boat's clean – now. Took me a day to sort it out after weeks of carrying limestone to the wharf at Llanfoist.

The womenfolk will be pleased. This is their big day of the year, the Ironworks annual outing. They're still talking about last year's trip.

So you're all having a day in the great city of Newport. There's plenty of eating houses to choose from when you're not admiring the docks.

We've done it every year I've been working in these parts. It's a bit different from home in Ireland – there the only smoke comes from our turf stoves.

This is the future, my boy. But I can see the day when my trade goes to the railways and Newport Docks have ships going to every country in the world.

With the fruits of our labours. I tell you, Geraint, you have an easy life working the canals. Fresh air and only a bit of toil working the locks.

Easy, you say. When did you last shovel forty tons of ironstone into a boat so you could have the pleasure of shovelling it all out at the other end?

I'd love to be working with horses again. I tried for a horseman's job on the tramroad but they said they needed my muscles more in the furnaces.

Aye, well, let's cast off then.

3 'Story ghost', on a guided walk (which should be well illustrated) or as the basis for text for a self-guided trail

Axxx Bxxx talks about her school and community

Learning lessons in Blaenavon

Look around you and what do you see? A nice tidy town with houses and shops, a few public buildings and only wisps of smoke. Let me take you back to 18xx, to my time here, as a school mistress at St Peter's School. Oh there are plenty of houses and so forth, but only wisps of fresh air.

This is a proud town. It has its churches and chapels to suit everyone's taste in religion and plenty of public houses to suit some people's taste in refreshment. But look over there at the Ironworks. They've made this town, for better or worse. Working men have streamed in to labour at the roaring furnaces and their families have come with them.

The company has built all these streets of houses. You can see those over there are on two levels. That's so folk can enter at ground level from one street, and other folk live above them, entering at the back from the street higher up the hill. Nobody has more than two or three rooms or fewer than two or three children it seems.

It's not long since many of the children worked in the coal mine – over there on the hillside. Poor mites, some of them not more than seven or eight years old, working 12 hours a day in the dark, opening and closing doors to keep the air in the mine fresh. Now, happily, I've got them in my new school and they're doing very well.

They all take time to get used to the light in the classroom – the tall windows and high ceiling mean we don't need to use the gas lamps except in winter. It's quite different in their houses. I teach them all how to write and you'd be amazed at how quickly they learn. The girls are better than the boys, but the boys are brighter at their sums.

10 An Action Plan: implementing the interpretive plan

10.1 Introduction

We suggest the following principles should be agreed for the provision of interpretation facilities and media, provided under the aegis of this plan. We have based our proposals on low-key interpretive media supported by personal interpretation in both written and face-to-face forms to tell the story of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape. With these approaches we believe interpretation will become more of a two-way dialogue between interpreter and visitor, that local people can be more actively involved in its delivery, that it can be flexible and quickly adaptable to different circumstances and that a local 'style' can be achieved that *complements* the initiatives of other providers in the WHS.

Overall responsibility for the interpretation programmes must be clearly defined and we say more of this later.

We **recommend** the following principles for the Interpretation Plan:

10.2 Philosophy

- a sense of enjoyment, fun, pleasure and discovery should permeate all interpretation and reliance on formal, technical and specialised information and presentation should be avoided except where specific and accurate terminology can be used and explained to advantage;
- the 'lightness' of touch in interpretive presentation should not imply a light-weight approach to interpretation which should always support the integrity of the topic and the status of the WHS;
- the thematic approach – using the storyline strands - should guide the provision of all interpretation with an emphasis on telling stories through people rather than topics;
- interpretive media should allow for a degree of repetition, overlap and cross-reference to ensure that visitors to any one site are aware of the wider story of the WHS and the other sites within it;
- the range, intensity and themes of interpretive provision should vary to meet different interests, levels of interests and knowledge, and aspirations to learn or achieve;
- wherever possible interpretation should be 'spoken' as if by a named or generic character, using original words where possible or scripted text;
- in all cases, text / sound should be in Welsh and English using a range of devices (eg back-to-back text on 'people pointer posts') to minimise the need for parallel text;
- the needs of people with physical, sensory, intellectual and social challenges should be considered as an integral part of the whole approach.

10.3 Approach

- semi-permanent interpretive media should be limited in both scale and in number;
- use should be made of visual allusions in the design of interpretive structures, site furniture etc; elements with the Torfaen Public Art Strategy could play a part in this;
- the design of interpretive media should be sympathetic to the surroundings;

- tactile, and non-verbal, interpretive media should be used where possible, both on their own and to support word-based material;
- on-site interpretation should be limited to low key installations in car parks and at key features;
- structures and installations should be of local, natural materials as far as possible, in keeping with 'industrial' character of existing installations and broadly following the design guide;
- local people, including craftspeople and children, should have the opportunity to contribute to the content, design and production of interpretive media, providing that at all times high standards of delivery are maintained;
- the needs of all visitors should be considered when developing any approach to interpretation.

10.4 Practice

- the use of the applied, performance and graphic arts should be included wherever appropriate and possible;
- interactive media should be used where possible at events such as role-play, costumed guided walks etc;
- the interpretive media should include innovative events and interactive activities suitable for local users and visitors;
- the events programme should include activities such as talks, workshops and guided walks involving local experts, tradespeople, craftspeople etc, performances of music, singing, dramatised events, a storytelling festival etc;
- the principal interpretive approaches should be used for devising games, quizzes and discovery trails to encourage family participation;
- involvement of the community in local events, fairs, markets, pageants etc should be encouraged and enabled whenever possible;
- conservation activities reflecting the intrinsic interest and value of the WHS should be included in the events programme;
- all media should comply with both the spirit and the demands of the Disability Discrimination Act.

10.5 Boundaries

As we stated in the Interpretation Plan, we have taken as the basis for the interpretive boundary of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape an extended area of the WHS which incorporates:

- To the north, the Clydach Gorge, Gilwern and Govilon area
- To the east, the stretch of Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal that includes Goytre Wharf
- To the west, the rest of Coity Mountain.

10.6 Interpretive themes

We recommend the use of the following storylines, or themes, which were articulated in the Interpretation Plan:

Theme / Storyline A: **The story of industry and trade**

- *The Blaenavon Industrial Landscape is a unique and remarkable relic of the development of heavy industry and its resultant economic and commercial achievement at the forefront of the industrial revolution.*

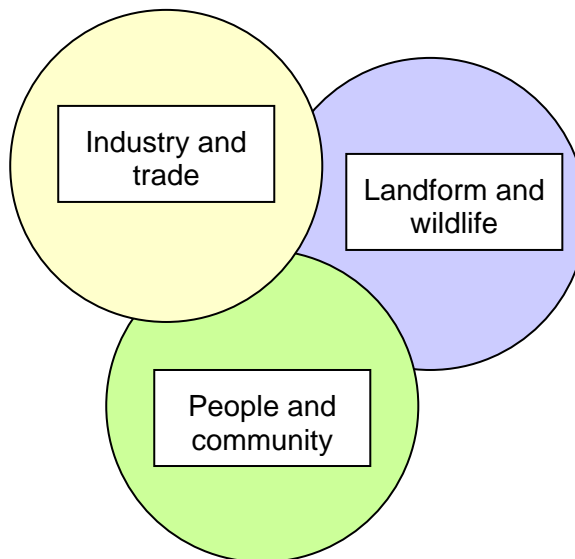
Theme / Storyline B: **The story of people and community**

- *The Blaenavon Industrial Landscape is a powerful evocation of human endeavour, toil and achievement within the industrial, commercial and transportation operations and in the wider community which survives to this day.*

Theme / Storyline C: **The story of landform and wildlife**

- *The Blaenavon Industrial Landscape represents the overwhelming impact of unrestrained industrial development on the environment and the steps taken to safeguard historical features while enhancing and conserving the countryside.*

Each of these storylines implicitly includes the role of people who should always figure prominently in all interpretation.

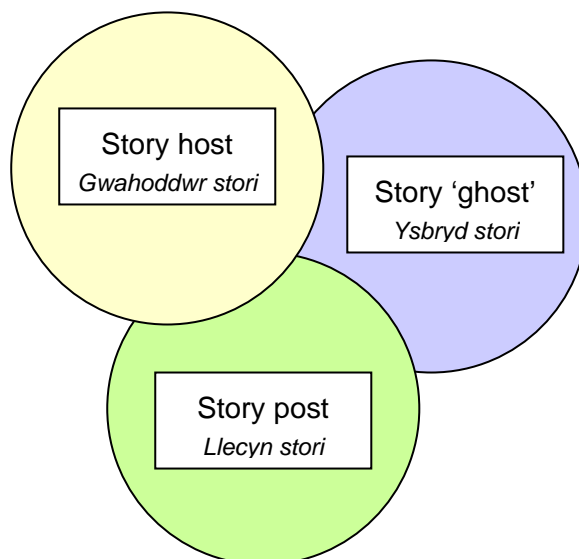


10.7 Interpretive channels

We **recommend** the use of the following three principal channels of communication for telling the stories:

- **The story host / gwahoddwr stori** – a present-day real person or representational but fictitious person who conveys one or more of the storylines either on his or her own or in ‘conversation’ with a character, a ghost, from the past
- **The story ghost / ysbryd stori** – a real and, in most cases, a representational person from the past who conveys one of the storylines either on his or her own or in ‘conversation’ with another ghost (of the same period) from the past

- **The story post / llecyn stori** – a site, indoor or outdoor, visual, aural or ‘virtual’ (ie electronic), where one or more of the storylines is used to tell the relevant story or stories.



This framework allows for the use of a wide range interpretive media, but the people-based approach should be echoed throughout, eg on a website, the stories should be ‘told’ by a host or ghost character with the websites effectively being the ‘story post’.

10.8 Interpretive characters

We **recommend** that the following initial selection of real and fictional individuals be used as historical characters, the story ghosts, as set out in the following table. The choice has been limited at this stage to 15, with five representing each of the three storylines. There is no reason why additional characters should not be introduced into specific interpretive programmes or media but it is important to keep a tight rein on numbers until the system is established to avoid dissipation of effort and effect.

Blaenavon Industrial Landscape : Table of characters			
<i>Name</i>	<i>Male / female</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Period</i>
Storyline A: The story of industry and trade			
Thomas Hill	Male	Entrepreneur, founder of Blaenavon Ironworks	Early days
Sidney Gilchrist Thomas	Male	Industrial innovator and improver	Heydays
Timothy McCarthy	Male	Ironworker, resident of Engine Row, Blaenavon	Heydays
Margaret Thomas	Female	Child mineworker	Heydays
Lewis Browning	Male	Miner at Big Pit	Later days
Storyline B: The story of people and community			
Abraham Harry	Male	Local smallholder / part-time miner	Early days
Axxx Bxxx	Female	Schoolteacher	Heydays

Cxxx Dxxx	Female	Ex-coal miner, brick worker	Heydays
Exxx Fxxx	Male	Trade union officer	Heydays
Alexander Cordell	Male	Novelist and publiciser of the Blaenavon industrial era	Later days
Storyline C: The story of land and wildlife			
Lord Abergavenny	Male	Landowner	Early days
Geraint Hxxx	Male	Canal boatman or canal worker	Heydays
Mrs Billy Harris	Female	Wife of Garnddyrys Inn landlord	Heydays
Dai Laffyn	Male	Fictitious / anonymous poacher	Heydays
Kxxx Lxxx	Female	Commoner and social worker / welfare worker	Later days

These characters should be mirrored by present day individuals who may, for a variety of reasons, simply be themselves, acting as story hosts, guardians of particular or general aspects of the three storylines. However, staff at visitor attractions or walks leaders could choose to be in character, either playing a contemporary figure, such as a geologist, or one of the story ghosts. This will depend on individual capabilities and circumstances. In interpreting the story of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, however, they should make as full use of the story ghosts as possible to maintain consistency, using chosen characters as examples of period individuals. Interpretation is, in essence, storytelling and, as such is part of 'theatre'. The level of theatre that can be achieved in any one case will depend on a variety of circumstances and abilities.

10.9 Key interpretive media

Illustrations and costumes

We **recommend** that, before any interpretive initiatives are implemented, the following essential preparatory work is undertaken to:

- produce a series of defining illustrations of the characters to be used in all interpretation media; the style should echo that of the stylised but effective illustration employed in the branding of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape WHS in order to maintain a visual link;
- commission a series of costumes, designed to mimic the style of illustration, which can be used in all person-to-person interpretation from hosting on site to leading guided walks and other activities; the costumes could be designed to fit over wearer's own light clothing so that they can be used by more than one person without constant laundering.

Printed materials

Many printed materials already exist and it would be impracticable to suggest replacing or adapting them until the end of their normal life. When such a time comes, then the principles of this Interpretation Plan should be applied and the text partly or wholly re-written to take account of the storyline strands and the story ghosts (and hosts). The overall house style should be applied wherever appropriate and chosen story hosts illustrated.

We **recommend** that the guide books for Big Pit and Blaenavon Ironworks, when revised, will refer, at the very least, to the interpretive approach employed throughout the WHS although we do not suggest they be re-written to incorporate it.

An interpretive map leaflet

Specifically, however, we **recommend** that work is started to produce an interpretive map for the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape WHS employing a similar approach to that used by British Waterways in their interpretive maps for key sites (including Goytre Wharf). Such a publication for the WHS would be based on a two-sided A2 sheet folded to A5 and including an easy-to-follow 'bird' eye' oblique map / plan of the WHS, with brief introductions to its key features. This would be supported by a series of short but detailed interpretations of natural, historical and cultural aspects told by the story hosts and appropriately illustrated. In addition, the leaflet would contain brief details of access information including walking and cycling routes in the Valley, and other services.

This map leaflet should act as the primary piece of interpretive print for the WHS and its style would clearly evoke the overall design style for the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape. It would be widely distributed as part of the marketing effort (and cost) for the WHS. It should be produced in both English and Welsh – or could be bi-lingual (with parallel texts placed together) but at the cost of 50% of the interpretive content. Simply-produced translations of the text in selected foreign languages should be available at TICs and other outlets.

Story ghost leaflets

The storylines, or elements within them, would merit individual treatment in the form of simple A4 leaflets (folded to one-third A4). We **recommend** a series of these leaflets which would deal with the story of one or more story hosts, where their stories could be interwoven to interpret, for example, the early days of Blaenavon – *how it all began* – or life in the town in the 19th century. The same principles, of style, illustration etc should be followed and each leaflet should contain both English and Welsh text. The leaflets could employ the technique of strip cartoons which demand good skills in both writing and illustrating and are excellent means of conveying a lot of information simply and entertainingly.

Part of the purpose of each leaflet in what could become a series would be to reinforce the reason for the WHS designation and why it is internationally respected.

A guide book to the WHS

There are already two good guide books to the key attractions in the WHS – and other publications that deal with aspects of it – but the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape merits its own guide book. We **recommend** the production of such a guide, incorporating of course the principle sites, but presenting a holistic overview of the WHS, effectively extending in depth and breadth the recommended interpretive map leaflet. This guide book should use the story ghosts, as well as contemporary story hosts, to give a easily-understood but comprehensive picture of the origins, development and current state of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape and its status as a World Heritage Site.

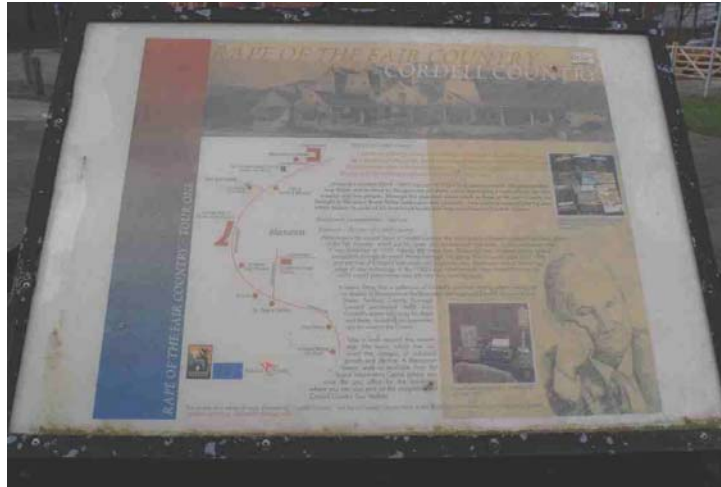
A guide book of this nature should be produced separately in both English and Welsh and should call upon scholarly advice in developing its content but the skills of an experienced interpretive writer in preparing the text. It should call upon good maps and plans as well as illustrations of the chosen characters (who could be the storytellers) and locations. It should be accessible to young people from, say, 12 years upwards and be a highly-attractive and appealing publication.

Graphic panels

The term graphic panels covers a wide range of different installations both indoors and outdoors. Where existing indoor displays are being revamped or replaced, for example at Blaenavon Ironworks, we **recommend** that they incorporate the interpretive principles and practices we have set out above wherever feasible, including the echoing of the WHS design

style. In particular, they should make us of the story ghosts as storytellers and, where, appropriate, incorporate conversations between them.

The size of panel will depend on individual circumstances; the current branded panels, at about A1 size, are acceptable but a case can be made for a larger (ie A0) – or more often a smaller (say A2) – panel if need and location allow. Panels should be designed for no more than a five-year life as physical condition deteriorates, and graphic style and sometimes even content become out of date.



Faded panel at Blaenavon Ironworks car park RKE

Many of the existing outdoor interpretive panels are in need of replacement and others would benefit from improved content. There is an over-emphasis on information in many cases with little or no explanation of why and how whatever is being highlighted occurs or has taken place. They are, in effect, not interpretive. We set out below what replacement or new panels should concentrate upon.

While some sites merit substantial panels – where, for example, there is a clear vista which can be explained – we **recommend** that the replacement panels be of similar proportions.

We **recommend** that all panels, replacement and new:

- develop the existing design to be more flexible in layout and arrangement of content while not losing the essential qualities of the branding
- integrate short text passages in English and Welsh rather than provide completely parallel sections
- incorporate the storytelling conventions of the Interpretation Plan including passages by individual characters and conversations between characters explaining the subject of their story and not simply providing facts
- ensure that the illustrations of characters follow the consistent design style
- make use of simple quiz techniques (with answers provided at the next panel where there is a series of story posts in use – see below)
- incorporate images in relief for those with visual difficulties and which can also be ‘rubbed’, possibly as part of a ‘collect the characters’ simple challenge
- include references to walks in the immediate vicinity
- include references to sources of information
- incorporate, within or alongside the structure, a wind-up sound store containing a recording in Welsh and English that summarises the stories as told by the story hosts and ghosts (winding the handle activates a generator which powers the playing of the recording)

We **recommend** the replacement of existing panels at:

- Blaenavon Ironworks, with additional panels to augment the story currently told, making use of the selected story ghosts and, if necessary, other subsidiary characters

- overlook points such as Big Pit car park, Keeper's Pond
- the Alexander Cordell panels in the Ironworks car park

We further **recommend** the provision of new, large-format, panels at:

- Overlook points such as east of Bloreng, car park at the Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway, and at various viewpoints over the Usk Valley
- Wildlife points such as a Garnddyrys, Garn Lakes and the canal

As far as panels provided, for example, by Govilon Heritage Group and other community interests, we **recommend** that as existing ones are updated and new ones implemented they should take account of the recommendations in this Interpretation Plan in terms of storytelling, the use of characters and so on.



Interpretive panel at Garn y Gorfydd RKE

Outdoor 'story posts'

We **recommend** the design and installation of smaller panels, as the principal 'story posts', and of no greater area than A3 (but not of that shape), designed to fit within fence posts or similar structures, seating or other countryside furniture in such locations as:

- stopping points on the Bloreng, along former tramways and at key features (other than overlooks)
- stopping points within Blaenavon town to highlight key features
- stopping points in Clydach

former tramway from Pwll Du, through Garndyrys forge to the incline at Llanfoist. These story posts would use the 'signal sign' convention devised by the Forestry Commission, or a variation of it, where a long, slim panel is held in a slot in a fence post, on a pivot, and

accessed by lifting the panel edge at a notch in the post. Such signs are seen only when being read and are thus unobtrusive and offer a simple interactive device.

The story posts would include short interpretive text (no more than 50 words) and one or two illustrations, in the standard style, relating only to the specific site. As they would be double-sided, English and Welsh text would be on either side. They could be devised as a series, with 'teaser text' or quiz questions, linked to the next panel if they were placed in along a recommended route from, say a car park.

The posts could also incorporate, within their structure, a wind-up sound store containing a recording in Welsh and English that summarises the story on the panel as told by the story hosts and ghosts (winding the handle activates a generator which powers the playing of the recording).

Alternatively, similarly shaped signs could be fixed vertically to existing posts or structures but would need both languages on the face, making them larger and more obtrusive.

Websites

We **recommend** that the WHS website, and those others with sections relating to the WHS, be redesigned to incorporate the principles of this Interpretation Plan, to highlight the story ghosts (and hosts) and the storytelling approach. The corporate style should, of course, be used including the specifically designed illustrations of characters etc.

All sections should be capable of downloading.

Animations

We **recommend** that consideration be given to developing animations, possibly in 'cartoon' form, of stories told by story ghosts for use on the website, in educational material etc. Such animations could also be available for access by mobile phone, MP3 players etc (see below).

Audio tours / video tours / mobile phone tours / PDA tours

We recommend that all audio, video and similar tours, however electronically provided, use the storytelling conventions developed in this Interpretation Plan, with appropriate use of characters speaking both Welsh and English.

Meeting visitors

We **recommend** that staff at visitor attractions and guides leading walks or giving talks act as third-person story hosts, incorporating the principles of storytelling and the stories of specific characters either as the principal mechanism or as illustration of specific aspects.

Story hosts and ghosts

We further **recommend** that, where practicable and 'comfortable', such staff and guides act as first-person story hosts, taking on the persona of a contemporary character, such as a modern engineer, geologist, naturalist or whatever, or of a historical character from the 'cast' we have identified. This means devising what is in effect an 'act' either for the whole of a visit or walk, or at certain points in it. Such an approach has been used to great effect at, for example, Stirling Gaol, where an actor plays, successively, a series of different parts. We

would advocate flexibility in this approach which demands either the use of trained actors or training for those keen to work in this way.

One important aspect of implementing the Interpretive Plan would be, therefore, to set up a comprehensive training programme for story hosts / guides to cover not only all the requirements of good interpretation and tour leadership but also, for those who wish to take part, for 'first person' characters.

Guided walks and cycle rides

We **recommend** that the existing programme of guided walks and rides, led by local experts and enthusiasts, be developed to use the storyline strands within this Interpretation Plan as an additional mechanism for attracting interest and relating individual walks and rides to the whole, perhaps by promoting a linked series over different seasons of the year. Some of these activities could use story hosts and ghosts as we suggest above.

We **recommend** that the following new walks and rides are devised:

- Town trail in Blaenavon
- Circular or looped cycle trail around key sites in the WHS

The same recommendations in relation to training, as set out above, apply to leaders of walks and cycle tours.

Events and activities

We **recommend** that a programme of events and activities be developed to help explain the WHS through entertaining activities and enjoyable experiences. There are many ways in which this could be done including:

- craft-making activity days principally related to iron-founding (at the Ironworks) but including other trades and crafts at suitable locations – an extension of the programme of blacksmithing demonstrations at Big Pit; these could allow for craft demonstrators to be story hosts – as contemporary craftspeople – or as story ghosts, taking the part of a historical character
- a range of appropriately themed events such as a miners' gala, a Victorian Sunday school picnic, a Chartists' rally or an Edwardian music hall event in the Workmen's Hall and Institute
- a storytelling festival, encouraging local children and adults to take part along with invited storytellers from other parts of the country, with a competitive element if appropriate and a grand finale
- street theatre presentations at set times or dates to develop the overall convention of the storytelling 'theatre' by incorporating specially-written playlets on a range of topics from workers' rights to outdoor



Dry stone wall training Torfaen CBC

worship, from family incidents to traders' disputes, all devised to illuminate the story of the WHS from different points of view

- incorporating role-playing by willing members of the public, particularly children, in street theatre, and devising other opportunities for role-playing, for example at Big Pit, Blaenavon Ironworks and extensions of existing educational or recreational learning experiences



Ranger workshop Torfaen CBC

Educational materials and activities

We **recommend** the development of a web-based, and CD Rom, educational pack for the WHS as a whole that includes information about the geography, geology, landscape, ecology, industrial history and cultural heritage of the WHS and the life of the people who lived and worked – using the storytelling principles articulated in this Interpretation Plan.

The educational pack should offer opportunities for pre- and post-visit activities, as well as themed trails, role-playing and developing personal 'reports'. All educational material should be developed in conjunction with teachers and / or other educational experts, be linked to the National Curriculum and should encourage children to take the part of characters from the story and articulate their experiences.

Other proposals

A Blaenavon Industrial Landscape car trail

We **recommend** that, until the establishment of dedicated eco-bus tours of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, the development of a car-based trail of the WHS should be considered. Although not the most environmentally-friendly of activities, such a trail would take account of the reality that most visitors will continue to come by car for the foreseeable future and many will already choose to drive around the area. The trail would allow such visits to be more 'directed' (in terms of what visitors should look for and enjoy) and should include those areas we have identified as outside the formal boundary of the WHS but important for their links with the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape.

The basis for the trail should be to paint a comprehensive and inclusive picture of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape through the use, again, of storytelling and story hosts. Stopping points on the trail should, as far as practicable, be those already used for other purposes, such as car parks, overlooks and visitor attractions. However, the car trail could well make use of the story posts we recommended above as additional contributors to the story. The car trail could be an audio-trail, based on an in-car CD, or could make use of downloaded material for MP3 players, mobile telephones etc.

Clearly, the trail should encourage users to visit the various attractions, the facilities of Blaenavon, village pubs and so on. Suggesting a car trail be considered in no way reduces our wish to see the use of sustainable transport.

Public transport

At present, there are limited opportunities for visitors who lived beyond the regular bus routes into Blaenavon to visit by public transport. However, we **recommend** that bus operators be encouraged to promote the use of their services by adopting elements of the storytelling approach and the use of characters from this Interpretation Plan.

11 Action Table

The following table sets out the recommended actions in section 10.9 – Key interpretive media. Costs pa are all estimates and those in italic are revenue costs pa rather than capital costs pa. No costing has been included for initial interpretive development, marketing and publicity or staffing, at this stage

Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site								
Interpretation Plan								
Activity	Lead Agency	Partners	Programme			Cost	Funding source	Comments
			Short term	Med term	Long term			
01 Illustrations	WHS	All	Yes			£5,000	WHS	
02 Costumes	WHS	All	Yes	Yes		£7,500	WHS	
03 Interpretive map leaflet	WHS	All	Yes			£6,000	WHS	
04 Story ghost leaflets	WHS	All		Yes	Yes	£5,000	WHS	
05 WHS guide book	WHS	All		Yes		£15,000	WHS	
06 New panels at Ironworks (say 8)	Cadw	WHS contrib.	Yes			£25,000	Cadw	
Sound stores (say 8)	Cadw	WHS contrib.	Yes			£5,000	Cadw	
07 New panels at car parks etc (say 10)	Various	WHS contrib.	Yes	Yes		£30,000	WHS etc	
Sound stores (say 10)	Various	WHS	Yes	Yes		£6,000	WHS etc	

		contrib.						
08 New panels at Cordell sites (say 4)	TCBC	WHS contrib.		Yes		£12,000	TCBC etc	
Sound stores (say 4)	TCBC	WHS contrib.		Yes		£2,500	TCBC etc	
09 New panels at wildlife sites (say 5)	Various	Various		Yes		£15,000	WHS etc	
Sound stores (say 5)	Various	Various				£3,000	WHS etc	
10 Story posts on Blorenge (say 10)	WHS	All	Yes			£10,000		
Sound stores (say 10)	WHS	All	Yes			£6,000		
11 Story posts in Blaenavon (say 10)	WHS	All	Yes			£10,000		
Sound stores (say 10)	WHS	All	Yes			£6,000		
12 Story posts in Clydach area (say 10)	WHS	All		Yes		£10,000		
Sound stores (say 10)	WHS	All		Yes		£6,000		
13 Story posts at wildlife sites (say 5)	WHS	All			Yes	£5,000		
Sound stores (say 5)	WHS	All			Yes	£3,000		
14 Revised WHS website	WHS	All	Yes			£5,000		
15 Animations for websites etc	WHS	All		Yes		£10,000		
16 Audio / video / mobile phone etc tours	WHS	All		Yes		£20,000		
17 Guided walks and rides – rev. costs pa	Various	Various		Yes		£2,000		
18 Events – Craft days – rev. costs pa	Various	Various		Yes		£5,000		
19 Events – Open days – rev. costs	Various	Various			Yes	£3,000		

<i>pa</i>								
20 <i>Storytelling festival – rev. costs pa</i>	<i>Various</i>	<i>Various</i>			Yes	£10,000		
21 <i>Street theatre – rev. costs pa</i>	<i>Various</i>	<i>Various</i>			Yes	£5,000		
22 <i>Role playing – rev. costs pa</i>	<i>Various</i>	<i>Various</i>			Yes	£2,500		
23 Educational materials	WHS	All		Yes		£10,000		
24 Car trail leaflet	WHS	All		Yes		£3,000		

12 Making it happen

What are the risks?

The approach we have adopted in making recommendations for the implementation of the Interpretation Plan is inevitably open to a number of risks. These include:

- lack of enthusiasm to follow the principles articulated
- lack of commitment among key partners to the principles and practice
- lack of commitment to ensuring and maintaining quality of implementation
- lack of support of organisations outwith the key partnership
- failing support over time for the principles and practice
- insufficient funds to instigate the programme
- insufficient fund to maintain progress over time
- inadequate planning
- inadequate management
- lack of consistency, dissipation of effort
- poor writing and / or design quality
- poor product design / manufacture / installation
- lack of a single focus for managing and delivering the programme
- failing tenacity in maintaining the programme
- lack of support from visitors for the approach
- unwillingness of on-the-ground participants to play their part

What are the mechanisms and skills required?

The essential mechanisms and skills required to implement the programme include:

- a designated interpretation team of partners committed to fulfilling the principles and practice
- a commitment of financial resources
- a designated team leader
- provision of time, resources and support to implement the programme
- a team leader with good managerial, coordination and reporting skills
- a team leader with good consultative skills
- a team leader with an understanding of the processes involved
- a team leader able to obtain the most effective work from interpreters, writers, designers, contractors etc

- a team leader able to ensure consistency of approach throughout from the approach of those involved in developing, promoting and presenting the product to graphics, text and electronic media
- a team leader able to secure additional or matching funding from a variety of sources
- a team leader able to work with local communities as well as stakeholder and partner organisations

Michael Glen, Touchstone Heritage Management Consultants

Sarah Douglas, Red Kite Environment

Peter Seccombe, Red Kite Environment

May 2007

Appendix 1

Big Pit questionnaire results

80 visitors to the Big Pit were interviewed on Saturday 24th February, and Sunday 11th March 2007 as they left the Big Pit via the Shop. The first date was a showery and windy day at the end of the school half term period, the second was a sunny Sunday. The interviews were carried out in the lunchtime / afternoon periods. The 80 interviews were taken from visitor groups representing c. 280 people. There were no individual visitors: all were couples, families or groups of friends.

Every visitor group approached was remarkably happy to be interviewed, and all professed to have had a very enjoyable, fulfilling and memorable time. They bubbled with enthusiasm for their trip: it had clearly been a great experience. None offered any criticism except that in a few cases the interviewees felt that they should have been asked to pay ! They felt that payment would help preserve the site.

Origin of Visitors

All visitors except one came by car. The exception had walked from the Abergavenny area.

Within one hour's drive:	85%
One to two hours drive:	8%
Over two hours:	7%

All those within one hours drive had travelled from Wales except three. Those three had travelled from Bristol or Gloucestershire. Those from 1-2 hours drive had travelled from Swansea, Tenby, Swindon, Bridgwater and Worcester. Those travelling over three hours had travelled from Torquay, the East Midlands and Birmingham.

These drive times referred to distances travelled on that day, not necessarily home addresses. Thus those on holiday from say, Sussex, were linked to their place of holiday in the area – e.g. Crickhowell.

Commentary

The preponderance of visitors from a one hour drive time is typical of a site which attracts a lot of children, and for surveys taken in the winter period. The one hour drive time hides one major feature – the small number of visitors from Gloucestershire and the Bristol area, with a population of well over one million people. All but three of the one hour drive time visitors had travelled from Wales.

Holiday or Day Visitor Status

Of those visiting, 32% were on holiday in the area, 68% were day visitors.

Commentary

The high percentage of visitors who were on holiday, all from England, is a remarkable figure for the late winter. They were largely weekend break takers. Some were taking in sports

fixtures; a number were visiting the Brecon Beacons National Park. Some were on half term breaks.

Route taken

The Pontypool Road	40%
The Brynmawr Road	44%
The Abergavenny Road	15%
Pontypool via Varteg	Nil

The high numbers of visitors taking the Heads of the Valleys road is interesting. The low numbers taking the Abergavenny road probably reflects the low population levels in the Abergavenny area. Some of the visitors to the Brecon Beacons National Park who might have taken the Abergavenny road had taken minor roads to reach Brynmawr.

Post Visit Travel Intentions

To return home	70%
To visit another town or area or attraction	27%
To visit Blaenavon Town or another attraction in Blaenavon WHS	3%

The largest single other post visit destination was Abergavenny with 4 intending visitors.

Commentary

The majority of visitors return home after their visit. This reflects their length of visit, typically 3 hours or more, the excitement of the visit, and the number of children in the groups who could not take any more. The tiny numbers going on to visit Blaenavon town was disappointing. Several visitors asked the interviewer what was on offer in Blaenavon. On a Winter Saturday afternoon, it was difficult to give a good answer.

Repeat Visits to Big Pit

39% of those questioned said that they had been to the Big Pit before, about one third of those had been several times. The repeat visits stretched back to the opening of the site, with several visitors who had been as schoolchildren now returning with their own children.

Commentary

The repeat visit figures are remarkably high. They are higher than the figures given in the 2006 National Museum of Wales Visitor Survey because that figure only included repeat visits made within the last 12 months. The high number of repeats says much about the appeal of the Big Pit, about the many things to see and think about on site, and about free entry.

Previous Visits to / Knowledge of sites in Blaenavon

80% of the first 50 visitors interviewed said that they had never been to any of the other sites in Blaenavon or to the town. Of the 20% who had been, 2 had visited the iron works, 4 had visited relatives or friends, and the remaining 4 could not remember why they had visited.

The 30 visitors interviewed on the second day of questionnaire work received a slightly different question. Which other historic sites could they name in the World Heritage Site. The Iron Works scored 5 mentions. None of the other sites – Cordell Museum, Workmen’s Hall, Railway, Blorenge and other landforms – received recognition, even on prompting.

Commentary

This high figure for non visits to Blaenavon can be linked to the very low figure for visitors intending to go on to Blaenavon after their visit to Big Pit. The lack of knowledge and recognition of the other sites indicates the dominance of the Big Pit’s marketing efforts, its powerful brand name and the low impact of the World Heritage Site story/brand.

Knowledge of the term World Heritage Site

Visitors were asked if they knew what the term World Heritage Site meant.

Did not know or were not sure	36%
Denoted a special heritage site under protection	26%
A Unique or Important Place	28%
A Historic Place	8%
Run by a Charity	2%

Other WHS sites visited

Visitors were asked if they had visited any other World Heritage Sites

Not sure	58%
No	30%
Yes	10%

Commentary

The questions about World Heritage site status and WHS’s visited were difficult ones that caused most to stop, think and be insecure. Some were embarrassed and care had to be taken to dispel their embarrassment. It became clear that WHS status was not something that most people understood. Some wondered if sites like London, Cardiff Castle and the V&A Museum had WHS status. Most had visited Bath. Almost no one knew that Bath was a WHS. Of those who knew more, Stonehenge was their favourite example. It is a difficult concept about which few “normal” people know. It is not easy to explain, but it lies at the heart of potential visitor experience at Blaenavon.

The Motives for visiting the Big Pit?

Recommended by friends etc, good reputation	28%
Wanted to experience history, etc	20%
Wanted to show a visitor Wales and its heritage	18%
Free Entry	20%
The Kids	9%
A Day Out	14%
Want to go underground	8%
Had a mining background / family	8%
Been before and liked it	10%

Interviewees could name more than one motive – hence these numbers add up to more than 100%

What were the Best Aspects of the Visit?

The Guides	65%
It was free and offered so much	32%
Going Underground	28%
The whole thing	25%
The Galleries	24%
The Darkness without lights	14%
The Baths /Interpretation	8%

Interviewees could name more than one motive – hence these numbers add up to more than 100%.

Commentary

These questions revealed why the 2006 National Museum of Wales Visitor Survey found that Big Pit was the most exciting site within the Museum's fleet. They also show the power of the special type of well designed but unscripted guided tours offered by "real" miners. Most interviewees remembered the names of their guides even an hour or more after the tour had finished. Words used were "magic", "perfect", "personal" and "so authentic". They tell much about the problems faced by Big Pit as their ex-miners grow old, and they tell much about the need for an equally powerful set of experiences to be created across the whole Blaenavon World Heritage Site if the area is to become an effective destination, and if WHS status is to regenerate the area.

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