



LEARNING FROM THE PAST LEARNING FROM THE FUTURE

Forgotten Landscapes End of Programme Event 8th and 9th October 2014

Notes of Proceedings

Over 67 delegates joined the Forgotten Landscapes Team in Blaenavon to discuss the successes and legacy of the programme over two days. The following notes are a summary of proceedings.

Wednesday 8th October

Heritage Education

Presentations from Gareth Kiddie (FLP Interpretation Consultant), Sharon Ford (Learning Manager at Big Pit National Coal Museum) and Ashleigh Taylor (Torfaen CBC Heritage Officer)

The impressive Heritage Education programme was initially developed and delivered by Ceri Cadwallader, FLP's Education and Interpretation Officer. Sharon Ford talked about how the education programme's ethos was a real partnership approach for real world learning. She highlighted the great benefits of learning outside the classroom – people engage more when they learn actively by doing rather than listening and engage with their environment.

The education programme is rooted in the belief that education can transform lives and help reduce poverty by placing local heritage at the centre of the Welsh curriculum. This aims to create a generation of citizens who have greater pride in their community and as importantly themselves.

Sharon highlighted some of the activities that the National Museum of Wales undertook, with project partners, as part of FLP – including looking at importance of coal tips (historic and ecological value), woodland activities, Wales at War and the Victorian classroom.

The speakers highlighted the following key successes for the programme:

- Collaborative effort has resulted in high quality learning experiences
- Citizenship learning has worked – many young people went on to become junior rangers, young volunteers and develop a youth forum
- Real skills have been learnt which will help with employment
- Inter-generational learning resulted
- Worked especially well with adult learners and engaging local community

The work of heritage education is continue with Ashleigh Taylor as the full time education officer for the World Heritage Centre ensuring education programmes developed as part of FLP will continue – and also increase.

The collaborative ethos will also continue. Ashleigh has been working with the partnership to create a new strategy which will deliver learning on three key themes – World Heritage and Blaenavon; Industrial heritage of Wales and the Blaenavon Story; Science Technology, maths and engineering.

Volunteers – A vital resource

Presentations from Alvin Nicholas (former WHS warden and FLPs Commons Officer), Sarah Lewis (FLP's Volunteer Coordinator), Martin Rathbone (Drystone Walling Instructor) and Steve Smith (Brecon Beacons National Park Authority Area Warden).

Volunteers were a core element of the project and one of the main ways the project will remain sustainable. Volunteers engaged in a very wide range of activities – creating reedbeds, archaeological conservation, delivering talks, drystone walling, monitoring trails and practical land management. None of this work would have been possible without volunteers – they really are a vital resource. In particular volunteers have helped to clear a lot of waste which is not nice, but makes a great difference to the quality of visitor experience.

Volunteers recruited were aged between 18 and 70. The target number of volunteer days was 455, actual was 1273 which equated to £133,767. The effectively doubled the return on investment that was put in to developing the programme!

Developing skills in dry stone walling was a key part of the work and training. Three courses were run with trainers from all over the country. The scheme actually involved the first pass for anyone with Asperger Syndrome in the UK. Following on from the course, three unemployed participants have gained employment, based on the skills learnt and the programme is still continuing – 17 people passed a seven hour exam.

The team aimed to keep volunteers involved through newsletters, social events, awards, regular work parties and also a trip to Cornish Mines World Heritage Site. The volunteers now have formed a constituted body to continue the work and will be supported from income from the scheme's hydro-electric facility.

The volunteers worked jointly on projects with the Brecon Beacons National Park volunteers. Benefits of joint working have included pooling resources, training and working across both areas. This has meant that a well skilled volunteer force is available for a wider area.

It was more difficult sometimes to recruit younger people as it was difficult to balance targets with engaging the local community and employment schemes but junior rangers became an additional element to the project which successfully recruited a number of young people. A funding application will also be submitted to create 'Youth Ambassadors' concentrating on 14-25 year olds.

There was an overarching concern that with limited resources in the future the volunteering programme may not be able to be sustained as resources are needed for coordination and organisation. Again funding applications are being made to help address this.

Access and interpretation – Gareth Kiddie (FLP Interpretation Consultant)

Gareth outlined the interpretation strategy that was developed for the Forgotten Landscapes Programme. There are three key themes– transformed by industry, reclaimed by nature, and managed for the future. Gareth sought to bring these into one big idea to encourage people to explore the themes and decided to create a treasure hunt which involved developing a range of media to create 'the hunt'.

This included:

- A series of treasure maps with detailed illustrations, iconic steel housing for these and installed them at key gateways along with interpretation on the area;
- 10 treasure trails around the WHS with treasure markers embedded into the ground to get people to look around them giving clues to discover a 'mother marker'!

Other media included creating a series of digital stories with local people, some of whom went to school in the building which is now the world heritage site centre – asking them for their recollections about how the landscape had changed. Capture Wales is a great BBC resource and was the basis for the project. It matches audio to photographs. The participant is challenged to develop a script to ensure it is short, precise but engaging. These created powerful stories.

To bring the WHS story to life at the main visitor centre a “tell tale” trail was created using the Victorian school as a base for telling the stories of people who lived in Blaenavon. This included creating audio of various characters and also creating a school room experience.

The key challenges for the future were outlined:

- How to build on existing interpretation provision and make more of the treasure trail?
- How do we attract new audiences?
- How do we monitor and evaluate success?
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Also discussed were the opportunities to extend and develop the new provision especially at the World Heritage Site and engage more with the partnership and community.

Outreach and community engagement – Steve Rogers (FLP Scheme Manager)

Steve explained FLP's overarching aim is to create an internationally recognised visitor destination which leads to social and economic regeneration. Therefore community engagement was key to the process. In the development of the project, 140 organisations were involved in shaping the programme. Consultation was undertaken in a number of ways including using a volunteer with circus skills to engage young people!

This resulted in good community buy in and joint working with a number of local groups. Resulting projects included creation of a book on Blaenavon history and a pump track for young people to avoid damage to coal spoils which was later featured on BBC TV's Countryfile. The project also worked with partners such as with the Canals and River Trust to create a new canal festival Roots and Routes to mark the bi-centenary of the Monmouthshire and Brecknock Canal.

The project has kept in touch with partners and the community through talks and slide shows, meetings with community and specific interest groups, website and social media and monthly newsletters. It was asked how this level of engagement could be sustained after the programme had finished. FLP is currently setting up a structure to do this as part of the legacy scheme and hopefully people will remain engaged through online resources and social media.

It is hoped the ongoing legacy of this aspect of the project will be:

- More community groups engaged in the management of the WHS and who will have a better understanding of its global importance. This hasn't been fully evaluated but data is being captured by visitor surveys;
- The community projects will have great benefit for residents and visitors in the future;
- New projects developed inspired by the scheme.

Thursday 9th October

Land management and building a relationship with the area's commoners - Alvin Nicholas

Alvin explained that commons are an important part of our landscape for many reasons – economic, ecological, cultural and visual. Of all the land in the scheme area, 48% / 41sqkm is common land – which is broken down into the 10 common land units, managed by four commoners' associations. There are over 4000 sheep grazed on these commons plus a small number of cattle and ponies. There are just 30 active graziers.

It was identified early on that the main problem areas for graziers are broken boundaries, bracken, dogs and illegal off-road vehicles. FLP was the associations' first experience of the four organisations working together in partnership to deliver a landscape scale project. To agree the work of FLP a new Commons Management Group was established.

Commoners have delivered practical works to improve conditions on the commons. This was the ideal solution as the commoners felt they were looking after their own common and the money was being reinvested into the local community rather than an external contractor who had no knowledge of the land. Six graziers received accredited training and went on to contract out their services to the FLP project.

Their contracts included bracken rolling, fencing, heather cutting and burning to control scrub, increase structural diversity and create firebreaks. Training was given to commoners to understand the effects (positive and negative) of vegetation burning. As part of the FLP project a commons code of conduct and regional fire plan were also created.

A new study has been commissioned to look at the future of commons. The Commoners have contributed to this process and have said their wishes for the future would be to see more active graziers, more sheep flocks and their voices to be better heard.

The next step is to form a constituted BWHS Commons Management Group who will take an active management role in shaping the future of the commons. With constituted status they can apply for funding and will be part funded by Torfaen. Other ideas are also to engage with wider networks such as the Hill Farming Training Scheme and develop commons training opportunities, even a potential Centre for Upland Excellence. It was noted that none of these steps would have been possible without the Forgotten Landscapes Project.

Older demographics of the commoner community is a recognised issue as it is feared the current generation could be the last. Future FLP plans are to try and engage younger commoners and if training schemes go ahead it is hoped more young people will take up this opportunity.

Wildlife Conservation and Habitat Creation – Steve Williams, Torfaen's Senior Ecologist

Steve explained that the World Heritage Site has a surprising exceptional ecological value. The coal spoils are rich in wildlife and the wetlands left behind by the industrialisation of the landscape provide important habitats. Marshes and dry grassland are also a haven for wildlife. The World Heritage Site has a range of designations which include 1 SAC, 1 NNR, 2 SSSI, 2 LNRs and 2 RIGS.

The first stage of planning habitat and ecology improvement programmes was to undertake a wide ranging ecological audit. This tied in well with consultation with commoners as removing bracken, repairing boundary features and wildfire prevention has all had a very positive effect on existing wildlife. In addition new reedbeds were established which helped introduce new species.

To measure success indicators were created which mainly centred around monitoring the size of the Red Grouse population. During the FLP programme, numbers have almost doubled increasing from just under 60 to over 100.

Due to improvement works and publicity about the area's ecology, there has been a noted increase in visiting botanists and education groups which has helped boost the local economy.

Landscape Crime

Presentations were given by Gareth Phillips (Torfaen CBC's Group Leader for Economy and Enterprise), PC Rob Maddocks (FLP's seconded police officer), Inspector David Morgan (Police lead on off-roading) and Station Manager Matt Guerin for South Wales Fire Service).

Gareth spoke of the major issue of landscape crime with wildfires, flytipping and illegal offroading all having a big impact on the WHS.

Matt Guerin explained about the joint initiative with FLP and the South Wales Fire Service to create a Wildfire Plan. He explained the devastating effect wildfires have on communities and ecology. There are over 7000 deliberate fires each year and the cost to the SWF&RS is £9m a year. In 2004, 5 square miles of upland habitat were destroyed on the Blorenge. The wildfire plans aims to create an overarching guide to prevent fires, create firebreaks and ensure any fires can be tackled quickly and effectively with knowledge of access points and keys. There is also now a fire crime app which allows users to take photos of wildfire, flytipping and offroading and send to the relevant authority - <http://goo.gl/WxGroa>.

PC Rob Maddocks talked of his work and successes as the programme's seconded police officer. The scheme area covers 3 policing units, council areas and 6 police stations which made coordination difficult. The main areas of his work were tackling illegal offroading, fly-tipping, wildfire, wildlife crime, steel theft, anti-social behaviour in isolated areas and vulnerable/missing persons. Rob also developed farm watch, car park watch, mountain watch and Peregrine watch.

He dealt with illegal off-roading by education (50 warning signs, leaflets to schools and DVD), provision (worked with others to provide alternative routes) and enforcement (regular, visible patrols). There were 15 multi-agency operations carried out and the largest one involved 16 organisations, 10 police stations, helicopters, off-road bikes, mountain bikes and over 40 people.

Key successes included:

- 53% reduction in off-road vehicles
- 56% reduction in complaints from the public
- 43% reduction in thefts from tourist attractions
- Fly-tips cleared within 48 hours and new incidents were rare
- Successful prosecutions for fly-tipping
- A lot of publicity was generated about this work which helped raise awareness and also with prevention.

Inspector David Morgan talked about the future of tackling landscape crime. He described the situation as difficult due to funding being squeezed and at the moment there is no strategy for tackling Wildlife crime. There is also an issue in that police are not allowed to pursue off-roaders as they are classed as vulnerable so an appropriate way of responding needs to be decided. To develop a coherent and coordinated policy, David is currently creating a strategy and working with a range of stakeholders to develop this.

Archaeological Conservation – Dr Amelia Pannett, CADW

Amelia has worked with volunteers and education groups as part of the FLP project. As part of FLP's outreach and education plan, a community archaeology group was established to work on recording, surveying and conserving the many scheduled ancient monuments and other historic features in the WHS. As part of this, volunteers were trained in lime-mortar work which enabled them to undertake practical works including rebuilding walls. Trips were also taken to Cornish Mining World Heritage Site and Bath to learn how they deal with their conservation challenges and gave the volunteers a chance to develop their own knowledge.

Volunteers learnt valuable skills in archive research, project planning, archaeology research techniques, excavation, report writing and communicating findings. This has led to a team of archaeological trained volunteers which will be available for future projects in the world heritage site to undertake crucial monitoring of the historic features, something that CADW cannot do on a regular basis.

Future plans include a survey at the very important Garn Ddryrys site to help inform future management and interpretation, create an 'adopt a landscape' programme to monitor sites, develop an oral history project to record memories about specific sites and carry out recording of gravestones in St Peter's Churchyard.

Has FLP benefited the World Heritage Site? Laura Reynolds, Cardiff University

Laura Reynolds has just completed a Masters and as part of her dissertation research aimed to study the overall impact that FLP has made to the promotion and presentation of the World Heritage Site and the importance of partnership working.

Laura's research concluded FLP's main strength has been in developing an internationally recognised visitor attraction through increased awareness, bolstering appeal, enhancing understanding and enjoyment and encouraging involvement. Another key strength was revitalising collaborations and sparking further partnerships, especially establishing the volunteering programme which will see much of the work continue. It was also noted the success of involving the commoners which will aid future management and engaging the community.

The research looked too at the question of authenticity and that authenticity is not only influenced by the attributes but how individuals and organisations present these attributes. The findings showed FLP had added to the authenticity of the World Heritage Site.

Legacy Planning

Steve Rogers explains that there is a clear legacy for education, access and interpretation, volunteers, community-led initiatives/outreach and events. These are resourced well and it is felt that their benefits will endure. Some of the projects will need ongoing support through especially some of the community and volunteer based initiatives.

There are also key legacies created in land management, wildlife conservation and archaeological conservation but their future is less secure with no guaranteed way forward.

Two applications have been made for land management works over the next three years. There is also an initiative to develop a buffer zone for the World Heritage Site – a report has been commissioned and will be taken forward by the Blaenavon Partnership.

Final Thoughts

Drew Bennellick, Head of Landscapes and Natural Heritage for the Heritage Lottery Fund, summed up the conference. He highlighted the great achievements of the programme including the range of number of partners and education outcomes. He spoke of the need to reconnect people once again with the land and landscapes which the landscape partnership scheme aims to do.

The issue of reducing public finances was raised and the importance of legacy planning recognised. HLF will be relaunching their online community in a few months which will enable a greater range of people share experiences and ideas.

Some images from the site visits



