

Look before you leap

This issue has 'Research' as its theme. We've taken a fairly broad view of this: the articles look at how we can use information about what's happening to guide and plan future development, or make it more effective. Research is a way of putting your finger on the pulse: checking how visitors respond to different interpretation techniques (page 5), or finding out what tourists might be looking for when they come searching for traces of their Scottish ancestors (page 6).

Research is also a way to prepare for what you know you want to do, and perhaps for things you haven't even thought of yet. Ian Yeoman's article (page 3) explores this wonderful world, in which predictive research tries to dream of the future in a way that is genuinely useful for the present. If you're looking for how the astronaut cover fits in, this is the place to start!

If you want to try some research yourself, the first of Interpret Scotland's guidelines on interpretive planning is on page 11, with some starting points for thinking about your audience.

It's worth remembering, however, that the end result of all this should be to do something. After all the preparation has been done, interpretation requires a leap of faith and of imagination. Matt Baker (page 9) reminds us that having an idea, and putting it into action, is also a profound form of research.

James Carter, editor

Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.

Abraham Lincoln