

Editorial

The importance of 'knowing your audience'

I recall some years ago reading a research report SNH commissioned to look at the attitudes of young people to the natural heritage. It did not make comfortable reading; concern for and interest in the natural heritage just didn't seem to be important to this age group. In contrast, last year there was an exhibition of work produced by some of these same young people on natural heritage themes. The imagination, creativity and enthusiasm emanating from their work showed me quite clearly that by understanding what did motivate them, in this case working with multi-media artists, SNH had managed to awaken an interest in the natural world. It really does pay to 'know your audience'.

In this issue, in the first of a range of thought provoking articles, we are all challenged by Sam Ham and Betty Weiler to make our messages more 'meaningful'. In unravelling what the Scottish landscape means to people, David Masters is also inviting some lively debate. One thing all the articles convey to me is that interpretation is anything but a straightforward and formulaic approach to communication. The need to understand what motivates people and to have empathy with a site or object goes without saying, but it is the vital ability of a good interpreter to convey messages with flair and enthusiasm that makes interpretation effective.

The impressive list of organisations who now belong to the Interpret Scotland group is testament to the increasing importance placed on interpretation. The co-operative nature in which these organisations are working together to produce the journal and run training events is to be applauded.

Ian Jardine, Chief Executive, Scottish Natural Heritage

¹ The 'Young Peoples Art Project' involved 200 young people aged 12 –16 working with 35 artists to explore the marine and woodland environment. For more information about the touring exhibition and to obtain a free CD Rom of these projects contact Irene Watson, SNH on 01738 444177.